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MOST
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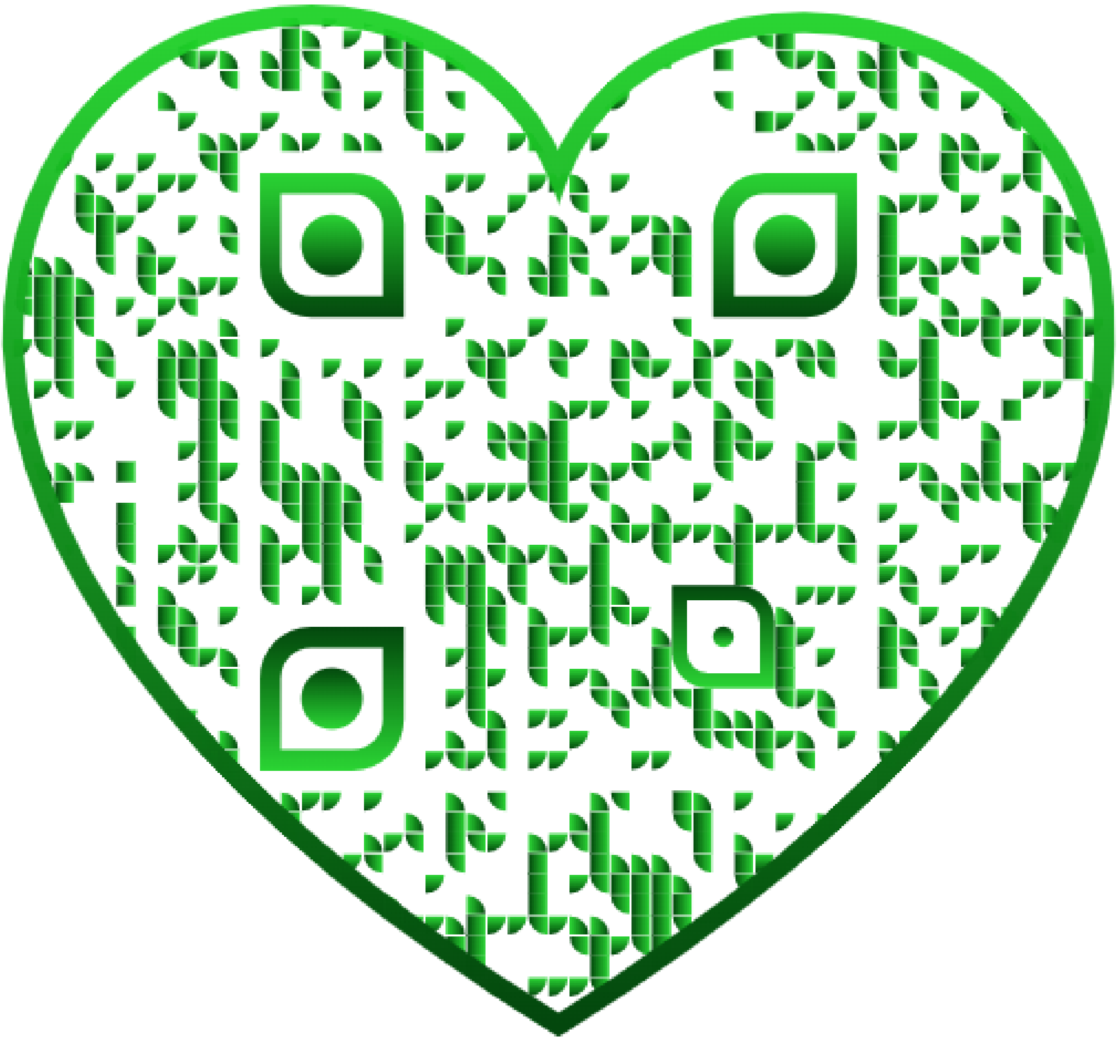
88RISING



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STEVE AOKI'S NEXT ACT

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APRIL 27, 2024
VOLUME 136
NO. 6

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Steve Aoki photographed by Jessica Chou on April 17 in Las Vegas.

Peggy Gou photographed by Aaron Sinclair on March 26 at Maison Celeste in Mexico City.

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MARTIN BANDIER
P R E S E N T S

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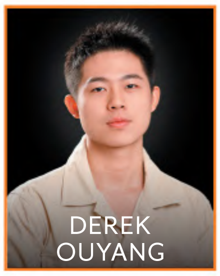

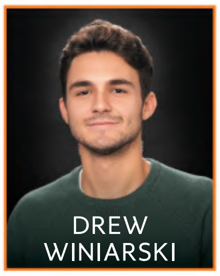

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Author
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Entrepreneur
Artist
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DATA FOR WEEK OF 4.27.2024

JULIA JOHNSON

'Sweet' Success: Hozier Hits No. 1 On Hot 100

BILLBOARD HOT 100

1		
"Too Sweet" Hozier		
LAST WEEK	PEAK POSITION	WEEKS ON CHART
2	1	4

HOZIER'S "TOO SWEET" rises to No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, becoming the Irish singer-songwriter's first leader on the chart. In his sole prior run in the top 10, he reached No. 2 with his breakthrough hit, "Take Me to Church," in 2014-15.

"Too Sweet" is from Hozier's EP *Unheard*, which debuted three weeks earlier as his fourth top 10 on the Billboard 200. In September 2023, he began his first U.S. tour since the pandemic; the trek continues with international dates scheduled through November. He told *Billboard* ahead of the tour, "I'm excited to share the work live with a fan base that has been with me now for 10 years."

Following "Take Me to Church," Hozier didn't reappear on the Hot 100 until April 2023 — but has now logged five hits in the past year. Prior to "Too Sweet," his highest mark during that span came after he was added to the remix of Noah Kahan's "Northern Attitude," which debuted and peaked at No. 37 in November.

"Too Sweet," which Hozier co-wrote and co-produced, drew 35.6 million streams and 14.1 million radio airplay audience impressions and sold 6,000 in the United States April 12-18, according to Luminate. It concurrently becomes his first Streaming Songs No. 1.

Hozier, who was born on St. Patrick's Day in 1990, notches the fifth Hot 100 No. 1 by an Irish act. He earns the first since Sinéad O'Connor's "Nothing Compares 2 U" in 1990 and the first by a male soloist since Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)" in 1972. The other two: U2's "With or Without You" and "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," both in 1987.

—GARY TRUST

Hot 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title / PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist / IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
4	2	1	#1 for 1 WEEK AIR **Too Sweet** BEKON,PETE G,CHAKRA,A.HOZIER-BYRNE (A.HOZIER-BYRNE,D.TANNENBAUM,P.GONZALES, D.N.KRIEGER,S.A.GHEMAN,S.D.JOHNSON,T.R.MEHLENBACHER)	**Hozier** RUBYWORKS/COLUMBIA	1	4
1	1	2	**Like That** METRO BOOMIN (N.D.WILBURN,L.T.WAYNE,K.L.DUCKWORTH,R.OLIVER,J.COOLEY,K.HOOD, A.TILMON JR.)	**Future, Metro Boomin & Kendrick Lamar** BOOMINATI/FREEBANDZ/REPUBLIC/EPIC	1	4
3	3	3	**Beautiful Things** E.BLAIR (B.BOONE,E.BLAIR,J.L.LARSEN)	**Benson Boone** NIGHT STREET/WARNER	2	13
5	4	4	**Lose Control** INFAMOUS,AMMO,J.BUNETTA (J.E.COLEMAN,J.C.BUNETTA,M.RODRIGUEZ-DIAZ,MIKKY EKKO, J.C.DIMSDALE)	**Teddy Swims** SWIMS INT./WARNER	1	36
2	5	5	**Texas Hold 'Em** B.KNOWLES CARTER,KILLAH B,N.FERRARO,RAPHAEL SAADIQ (B.G.KNOWLES CARTER,E.L.BOLAND, M.BULOW,B.V.BATES,N.FERRARO,RAPHAEL SAADIQ)	**Beyonce** PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE	1	10
8	7	6	**Lovin On Me** OZ,NIK D,S.MOMBERGER (J.T.HARLOW,O.YILDRIM,N.FRASCONA,S.MOMBERGER,N.J.PABON,D.M.GREER, R.NELTON)	**Jack Harlow** GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC	1	23
HOT SHOT DEBUT		7	**Espresso** J.BUNETTA (S.CARPENTER,J.C.BUNETTA,A.R.ALLEN,S.N.JONES)	**Sabrina Carpenter** ISLAND/REPUBLIC	7	1
9	8	8	**We Can't Be Friends (Wait For Your Love)** A.GRANDE,MAX MARTIN,ILYA (A.GRANDE,MAX MARTIN,I.SALMANZADEH)	**Ariana Grande** REPUBLIC	1	6
15	10	9	**Stick Season** G.SIMON,N.KAHAN (N.KAHAN)	**Noah Kahan** MERCURY/REPUBLIC	9	29
19	15	10	**Saturn** C.LANG,R.BISEL,SOLOMONOPHONIC,MONSUNE (S.I.ROWE,C.LANG,R.BISEL,J.SOLOMON,S.ZHANG)	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	6	8
12	12	11	**I Remember Everything** Z.L.BRYAN (Z.L.BRYAN,K.MUSGRAVES)	**Zach Bryan Featuring Kacey Musgraves** INTERSCOPE/BELTING BRONCO/WARNER/MCA NASHVILLE/WAR	1	34
23	16	12	**I Like The Way You Kiss Me** ARTEMAS,K.WHITE,T.DAINTREE (A.DIAMANDIS,T.DAINTREE,J.FINKELSTEIN, K.WHITE)	**Artemas** ARTEMAS/10K PROJECTS	12	4
14	13	13	**Cruel Summer** J.M.ANTONOFF,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,J.M.ANTONOFF,A.E.CLARK)	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	1	50
10	9	14	**Type Shit** METRO BOOMIN,D.RICHARDSON (N.D.WILBURN,L.T.WAYNE,TRAVIS SCOTT,J.T.CARTER, D.L.RICHARDSON)	**Future, Metro Boomin, Travis Scott & Playboi Carti** BOOMINATI/FREEBANDZ/REPUBLIC/EPIC	2	4
21	18	15	**Agora Hills** EARL ON THE BEAT,GENT!,JOHN BAPTISTE,BANGS (A.R.Z.DLAMINI,I.E.BYNUM,G.MEMISHI,J.B.KOUAME, B.PEPPLE,B.HOLLAND,M.SMITH)	**Doja Cat** KEMOSABE/RCA	7	30
13	14	16	**Greedy** R.B.TEDDER,J.L.HARRIS,G.BOUTIN (T.MCRAE,R.B.TEDDER,J.L.HARRIS,A.R.ALLEN)	**Tate McRae** RCA	3	31
-	11	17	**Wanna Be** ACE CHARISMA,PAYDAY,MKMENTALITY,YO GOTTI,ACE (G.WOODS,M.J.PETE,Y.M.DAVIS,A.FREEMAN, H.HIERMANN SOREBO,K.MEDER,M.MIMS,J.TAVERAS,P.D.BEAUREGARD,J.M.HOUSTON,M.WHITEMON, E.T.STEVENS,D.STEVENS,T.STEVENS)	**GloRilla & Megan Thee Stallion** CMG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	11	2
18	21	18	**Fast Car** CHIP MATTHEWS,J.D.SINGLETON,L.COMBS (T.L.CHAPMAN)	**Luke Combs** RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/ COLUMBIA	2	56
17	20	19	**Snooze** BABYFACE,K.VAN RIDDICK-TYNES,L.THOMAS,BLK (S.I.ROWE,BABYFACE,K.VAN RIDDICK-TYNES, L.G.THOMAS III,B.FERGUSON)	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	2	70
11	17	20	**Carnival** YE,TY DOLLA $IGN,THELABCOOK,THE LEGENDARY TRAXSTER,OJIVOLTA (YE,T.W.GRIFFIN JR,D.L.ROGERS, M.WILLIAMS,G.DICKINSON,J.T.CARTER,S.C.LINDLEY)	**¥$: Ye & Ty Dolla $ign Featuring Rich The Kid & Playboi Carti** YZY	1	10

Go to the Chart Beat section of billboard.com for complete charts coverage.

FloyyMenor, an 18-year-old native of La Serena, Chile, is No. 1 on Hot Latin Songs with Cris Mj (left) for a second week.

IGNACIO CRUZ

HOT 100

27

"Gata Only"

FloyyMenor X Cris Mj

How did "Gata Only" happen?

FLOYYMENOR I created that song about nine months ago. More than anything, I was inspired by my girlfriend. I had a show in Antofagasta [Chile], far from the capital of Santiago. After, I went to the hotel, and I started to write that song. I had visions before releasing it. I'm grateful for what is happening — I'm very proud of myself. My plan is to keep creating big hits worldwide. It gives me the desire to make more music and to continue for many years in the business.

Initially, "Gata Only" was your song alone. How did Cris Mj get involved?

I had released the song about a month before [rereleasing it on streaming platforms]. In that month, it received about 5 million streams. Then Cris Mj's manager talked to my manager, saying that Cris Mj wanted to join the original song. We didn't know each other at that point. I accompanied him to the studio, and he recorded his parts in Santiago. We are like brothers now: Sometimes we go out during the week, we go to the studio, we go out to eat at restaurants. It's great.

The track is No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Hot Latin Songs chart after first taking off in Chile — and makes you and Cris Mj the first Chilean artists in 25 years in the top 10. What's your reaction to that?

Little by little, other countries were receptive. I think TikTok helped a lot. I just keep praying to the one upstairs. I believe that things happen when you think positively. I'm from the new generation of Chilean artists, and I'm the first, with Cris Mj, to [reach the top 10 in the past 25 years]. More than anything, that is what makes me happy. It's a very difficult achievement to accomplish. —ISABELA RAYGOZA

HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS

Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart

ARTIST	SONG	DEBUT POSITION	DEBUT DATE
Tito Double P & Joel De La P	"La People II" with Peso Pluma	69	April 6
Artemas	"I Like the Way You Kiss Me"	70	April 6
Allison Russell	"Wildflower and Barley" with Hozier	88	April 6
Tanner Adell, Brittney Spencer, Tiera Kennedy & Reyna Roberts	"Blackbiird" with Beyoncé	27	April 13
Linda Martell & Shaboozey	"Spaghettii" with Beyoncé	31	April 13
Rumi Carter	"Protector" with Beyoncé	42	April 13
Willie Jones	"Just for Fun" with Beyoncé	59	April 13
Shaboozey	"Sweet * Honey * Buckiin' " with Beyoncé	61	April 13
Daylyt & Ab-Soul	"Pi" with J. Cole	62	April 20
Bakar	"Hell N Back" featuring Summer Walker	73	April 20
Chappell Roan	"Good Luck, Babe!"	77	April 20
ILLIT	"Magnetic"	91	April 20
Lay Bankz	"Tell Ur Girlfriend"	58	April 20
Ken Carson	"Overseas"	79	April 27

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE
BILLBOARD HOT 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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BILLBOARD 200

6

Linkin Park
Papercuts

The band's first hits compilation garners the act its 11th top 10-charting release as it launches with 44,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending April 18, according to Luminate.

24

Chris Brown
11:11

The 2023 release arrived as a deluxe edition on April 12 with 13 additional tracks, expanding the set to 35 songs in total. The album leaps 106-24 — its best rank since its second chart week (Dec. 2, 2023; No. 36).

30

Eagles
To the Limit: The Essential Collection

The compilation marks the 12th top 40-charting set for the group, and second this decade, following *Live From the Forum MMXVIII* (No. 16 in 2020). *Limit* also enters at No. 9 on Top Album Sales (7,000 sold).

1

Future & Metro Boomin
We Still Don't Trust You

Future and Metro Boomin's second collaborative album, *We Still Don't Trust You*, debuts at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 with 127,500 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending April 18, according to Luminate. It's the follow-up to the pair's *We Don't Trust You*, which opened at No. 1 on the April 6 chart (with 251,000 units in its first week). The latter rises 4-3 on the April 27 chart with 83,000 units (down 17%).

We Still Don't Trust You entering atop the Billboard 200 only three weeks after *We Don't Trust You* debuted at No. 1 marks the shortest gap between new leaders by an artist since Future replaced himself at No. 1 in 2017 in successive weeks, first debuting with his self-titled album (March 11) and then with *HNDRXX* (March 18). —KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist / IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
HOT SHOT DEBUT		1	#1 for 1 WEEK **Future & Metro Boomin** BOOMINATI/FREEBANDZ/REPUBLIC/EPIC	We Still Don't Trust You	1	1
1	1	2	**Beyonce** PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA	Cowboy Carter	1	3
2	4	3	**Future & Metro Boomin** BOOMINATI/FREEBANDZ/REPUBLIC/EPIC	We Don't Trust You	1	4
3	5	4	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	One Thing At A Time	1	59
7	8	5	**Noah Kahan** MERCURY/REPUBLIC	Stick Season	2	73
NEW		6	**Linkin Park** MACHINE SHOP/WARNER	Papercuts	6	1
-	6	7	**Benson Boone** NIGHT STREET/WARNER	Fireworks & Rollerblades	6	2
9	10	8	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	SOS	1	71
11	11	9	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	171
4	7	10	**Ariana Grande** REPUBLIC	Eternal Sunshine	1	6
8	13	11	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	Lover	1	243
6	9	12	**Olivia Rodrigo** GEFFEN/ICLG	Guts	1	32
10	15	13	**Zach Bryan** BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	Zach Bryan	1	34
14	17	14	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	Midnights	1	78
12	16	15	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	1989 (Taylor's Version)	1	25
13	19	16	**Drake** OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	For All The Dogs	1	28
-	2	17	**J. Cole** COLE WORLD/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	Might Delete Later	2	2
16	20	18	**Hozier** RUBYWORKS/COLUMBIA	Unheard (EP)	10	4
17	23	19	**Zach Bryan** BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	American Heartbreak	5	100
18	24	20	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	Folklore	1	195

SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

MOVING WINDMILLS

EMPOWERING A GENERATION OF CHANGE MAKERS

Since its founding in 2008, the Moving Windmills Project has emerged as a leader in ethical, hands-on development in Malawi. Rooted in purpose and community, we are committed to revolutionizing problem-solving for more sustainable and innovative futures.

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Learn more by watching this short film created with MASS Design.

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We're donating our ad space in *Billboard* to amplify voices of activists, organizations, and charities that reflect our core values and are creating real change.

Our International Power Player honorees —Jericho Adams, Temi Adeniji, Victor Aroldoss, Natascha Augustin, Kristen Burke, Caitlin Cadden, Howard Corner, Fabian Drebes, Alejandro Duque, Mark Fry, Geneva Gamblin, Chris Gobalakrishna, Shani Gonzales, Guillermo Gonzalez, Tony Harlow, Lars Karlsson, Jess Keeley-Carter, Alassane Konaté, Ben Larsen, Cesar Lores, Jay Mehta, Gustavo Menéndez, Santiago Menéndez-Pidal, Leila Oliveira, Alfonso Perez-Soto, Ben Ralph, Simon Robson, Tomas Rodriguez, Dan Rosen, Doreen Schimk, Adriana Sein, Jonathan Serbin, Matthieu Tessier, Alain Veille, Niels Walboomers, and Eric Wong — have chosen to spotlight Moving Windmills for their work to empower the next generation of creative innovators in Malawi by helping to build community and implement solutions to local issues.

WARNER MUSIC GROUP

RUEBEN BASTIENNE-LEWIS

BILLBOARD GLOBAL EXCL. U.S.

1

"I Like the Way You Kiss Me"
Artemas

ARTEMAS' FIRST BILLBOARD Global Excl. U.S. hit, "I Like the Way You Kiss Me," ascends to No. 1 with 65.9 million official streams (up 15%) and 3,000 sold (up 45%) outside the United States in the week ending April 18, according to Luminate. Its official video premiered April 12, boosting the darkwave song's performance.

The breakthrough hit for the English-Cypriot artist, released as a stand-alone single on Artemas/10K Projects, has been used in approximately 2 million clips on TikTok, where he teased the song prior to its March 19 arrival. The singer-songwriter (full name: Artemas Diamandis) has self-released two albums: *I'm Sorry I'm Like This* (in 2022) and *Pretty* (Feb. 9). The latter includes "If U Think I'm Pretty," which lifts 121-119 on Global Excl. U.S. with 11.7 million streams (up 3%) beyond the United States.

Meanwhile, two songs debut in the top 15 on Global Excl. U.S., led by Sabrina Carpenter's "Espresso" at No. 12. On the U.S.-based Billboard Hot 100, Carpenter brews up her first top 10 with the new single. It starts at No. 7 on the latter chart with 19.8 million streams and 5.1 million in airplay audience and 4,000 sold domestically in its first week.

Plus, Dua Lipa's "Illusion" enters at No. 13. It bounds 42-1 on Hot Dance/Electronic Songs following its first full tracking week, with 9.1 million streams, 7.4 million in radio reach and 2,000 sold in the United States. With former 16-week leader "Houdini" at No. 2 and "Training Season" at No. 3, Lipa is the first woman to simultaneously claim the chart's top three spots. All three songs are from her album *Radical Optimism*, due May 3.

—GARY TRUST

Billboard Global Excl. U.S.

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
4	2	1	#1 for 1 WEEK I Like The Way You Kiss Me	Artemas	1	4
1	1	2	Beautiful Things	Benson Boone	1	13
2	3	3	Magnetic	ILLIT	2	4
9	6	4	GG Gata Only	FloyyMenor X Cris Mj	4	11
13	7	5	Too Sweet	Hozier	5	4
3	4	6	We Can't Be Friends (Wait For Your Love)	Ariana Grande	1	6
5	5	7	End Of Beginning	Djo	3	9
8	8	8	Lose Control	Teddy Swims	3	23
6	9	9	Texas Hold 'Em	Beyonce	2	10
10	11	10	Greedy	Tate McRae	1	31
7	10	11	Bling-Bang-Bang-Born	Creepy Nuts	2	14
HOT SHOT DEBUT		12	Espresso	Sabrina Carpenter	12	1
NEW		13	Illusion	Dua Lipa	13	1
12	12	14	Cruel Summer	Taylor Swift	3	53
15	13	15	Luna	Feid & ATL Jacob	4	20
35	23	16	Sheesh	BABYMONSTER	16	3
18	18	17	One Of The Girls	The Weeknd, Jennie & Lily Rose Depp	5	28
22	21	18	Stick Season	Noah Kahan	9	24
16	16	19	Training Season	Dua Lipa	4	9
14	17	20	Madonna	Natanael Cano & Oscar Maydon	14	6

STREAMING AND SALES DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD GLOBAL EXCL. U.S.: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD — EXCLUDING THE UNITED STATES — AS TRACKED BY LUMINATE. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL-ONLY STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

GLOBAL OFFICES GLOBAL HITS

BUILDING THE RECORD LABEL OF THE FUTURE

ARTIST 100

1

TAYLOR SWIFT

WEEKS ON CHART

508

Swift returns to No. 1 on the Billboard Artist 100 a week before her *The Tortured Poets Department* makes an expected huge debut atop the Billboard 200 (dated May 4). Assuming the album enters at No. 1, it will mark her 14th leader. —KEITH CAULFIELD

NO. 21

Vinyl Drives Lana Del Rey

As Del Rey's *Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd* reenters the Billboard 200 at No. 62, she concurrently vaults 77-21 on the Artist 100. The album's resurgence follows the April 12 release of a new color vinyl variant of the set dubbed the "festival orange" edition. Combined, all eight of the album's vinyl variants (old and new) sold 10,000 copies in the tracking week ending April 18 (up 991%), according to Luminate, spurring the set's reentry at No. 3 on the Vinyl Albums chart. —K.C.

NO. 74

Chappell Roan's 'Rise'

Roan debuts at No. 74 on the Artist 100, largely powered by streaming gains for her 2023 debut full-length, *The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess*. Released in September, the set jumps 66-36 on the Billboard 200 (21,000 equivalent album units earned in the week ending April 18; up 42%), marking a new chart high and its first week in the top 40. Meanwhile, her new single and first song to appear on any *Billboard* chart, "Good Luck, Babe!," surges 77-44 on the Billboard Hot 100, driven by 9.6 million streams (up 44%). —XANDER ZELLNER

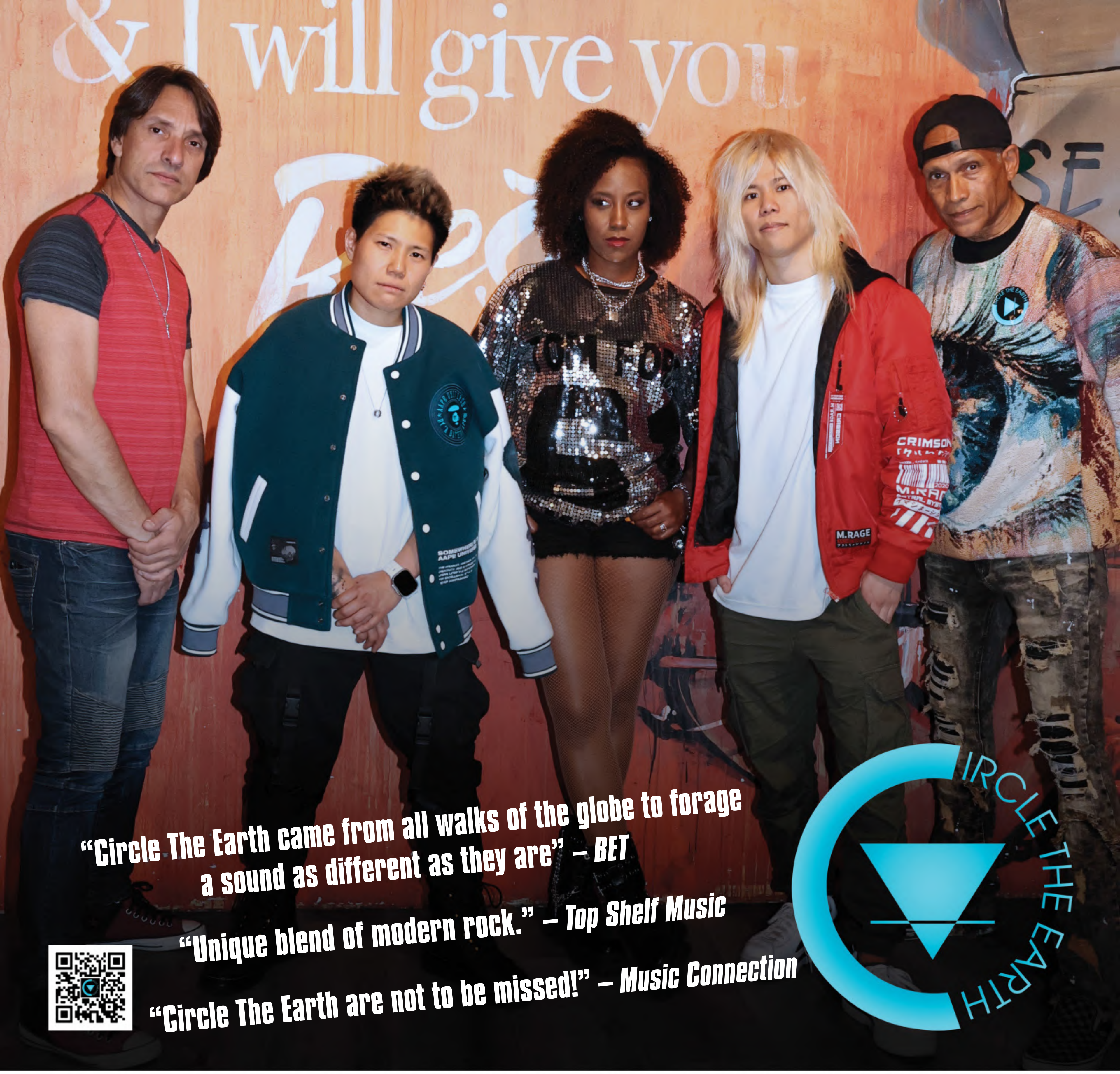
Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
2	2	1	#1 for 105 WEEKS **Taylor Swift**	REPUBLIC	1	508
1	3	2	**Beyonce**	PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA	1	284
4	5	3	**Morgan Wallen**	BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	267
6	12	4	**Future**	FREEBANDZ/EPIC	1	335
9	18	5	**Metro Boomin**	BOOMINATI/REPUBLIC	3	90
87	97	6	**Linkin Park**	MACHINE SHOP/WARNER	1	94
10	7	7	**SZA**	TOP DAWG/RCA	1	242
11	10	8	**Luke Combs**	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	1	372
12	6	9	**Benson Boone**	NIGHT STREET/WARNER	6	13
7	9	10	**Zach Bryan**	BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	1	101
20	26	11	**Noah Kahan**	MERCURY/REPUBLIC	6	45
-	1	12	**TOMORROW X TOGETHER**	BIGHIT MUSIC/IMPERIAL/REPUBLIC	1	71
5	11	13	**Ariana Grande**	REPUBLIC	1	437
17	15	14	**Jelly Roll**	BAILEE & BUDDY/BROKEN BOW/BMG/BBMG	4	92
16	14	15	**Hozier**	RUBYWORKS/COLUMBIA	3	117
15	19	16	**Teddy Swims**	SWIMS INT./WARNER	7	32
22	25	17	**Chris Stapleton**	SOUND/MERCURY NASHVILLE/UMGN	1	443
13	16	18	**Drake**	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	512
19	21	19	**Dua Lipa**	WARNER	1	311
8	13	20	**Olivia Rodrigo**	GEFFEN/IGA	1	153

SWIFT: BETH GARRABRANT. DEL REY: KIRBY GLADSTEIN. ROAN: RYAN CLEMENS.

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ARTISTS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



Female fronted, multicultural modern rock band **Circle The Earth** is back in 2024 with new music including their latest singles **"Maniac on Mute"** and "**Stuck In the Middle**"! Available on all streaming platforms.

"Maniac on Mute," written by 7-time Grammy nominee Lauren Christy (Avril Lavigne, Korn, Bebe Rexha) and produced by Erik Ron (Staind, Godsmack, Bush), is impacting at radio and climbing Mediabase's Activator Chart. Check out the official music video, directed by Henry Lipatov (Jennifer Lopez, Kelly Clarkson, Eminem, Fall Out Boy), on YouTube now! "**Stuck In the Middle**" (out April 24), also produced by Erik Ron, was written by Circle The Earth guitarist Kazuki Tokaji along with Gerina Di Marco and Adrian Jones.

Circle The Earth is comprised of five Los Angeles-based professional musicians from around the world: **Kazuki Tokaji**; guitar (Japan), **Sandro Feliciano**; drums (Brazil), **Sandy Chao Wang**; keyboard (Taiwan), **Michael McBay**; bass (U.S.A.), and **Khadia**; vocals (U.S.A.). For more info and to check out the band's latest music, videos, and shows, visit **circletheearth.band**.

CONTACT: Michael McBay michael@circletheearth.band | 213.915.2274 | Johnny Miller johnny@circletheearth.band

NO. 1

Shaboozey 'Bar'-Hops To No. 1

Shaboozey soars 34-1 on Emerging Artists thanks to his new single, "A Bar Song (Tipsy)." Released April 12, the track debuts at No. 6 on Hot Country Songs and No. 36 on the Billboard Hot 100 with 10.7 million streams and 10,000 sold through April 18, according to Luminate. It also launches at No. 1 on Digital Song Sales and Country Digital Song Sales as he earns his first three *Billboard* chart leaders. "Bar" introduces his album *Where I've Been, Isn't Where I'm Going*, due May 31.

The Virginia native also guests on "Spaghettii" and "Sweet * Honey * Buckiin' " from Beyoncé's latest full-length, *Cowboy Carter*, which leads Top Country Albums for a third week. He recently told *Billboard* that he's "so happy to have such a powerhouse of an artist that chose to take this journey to country, so it's amazing to be a part of that." —XANDER ZELLNER

Emerging Artists

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	WKS. ON CHART
34	1	#1 for 1 WEEK **Shaboozey**	AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE	3
1	2	**BossMan Dlow**	ALAMO	12
2	3	**Dasha**	VERSION III/WARNER	8
3	4	**BigXthaPlug**	BIGXTHAPLUG/UNITEDMASTERS	27
11	5	**Chappell Roan**	KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	7
4	6	**Tucker Wetmore**	BACK BLOCKS	8
RE-ENTRY	7	**girl in red**	WORLD IN RED/COLUMBIA	40
6	8	**Victoria Monet**	LOVETT/RCA	39
7	9	**Megan Moroney**	MEGAN MORONEY/ARISTA NASHVILLE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/COLUMBIA	84
RE-ENTRY	10	**ERNEST**	BIG LOUD	80

NO. 1

Fuerza Regida's Journey To No. 1

Fuerza Regida celebrates its first No. 1 on Top Latin Albums as its seventh studio release, *Pa Las Baby's y Belikeada*, climbs 2-1 in its 26th chart week. That is the longest climb to the peak since the Oct. 10, 2015-dated chart, when Juan Gabriel's *Mis Numero 1... 40 Aniversario* rose 4-1 in its 60th week. *Pa Las Baby's y Belikeada* debuted at No. 2 on the Nov. 4, 2023, chart and has yet to depart the top five.

Pa Las Baby's y Belikeada ascends to the top with 24,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending April 18 (up 17%), according to Luminate, almost entirely driven by streaming activity. (It's up 17% in streaming-equivalent album units, equaling 36.1 million on-demand official streams for the set's songs).

The new No. 1 becomes the fifth regional Mexican set to lead Top Latin Albums this decade, after Alejandro Fernández's *Hecho en México*, Eslabon Armado's *Vibras de Noche* and *Desvelado* and Peso Pluma's *Génesis*. —PAMELA BUSTIOS

Top Latin Albums

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist / IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	WKS. ON CHART
2	1	#1 for 1 WEEK GG **Fuerza Regida** STREET MOB/RANCHO HUMILDE/SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Pa Las Baby's y Belikeada**	26
1	2	**Peso Pluma** DOUBLE P	**Genesis**	44
3	3	**Bad Bunny** RIMAS	**Un Verano Sin Ti**	102
4	4	**Bad Bunny** RIMAS	**Nadie Sabe Lo Que Va A Pasar Manana**	27
7	5	PS **Fuerza Regida** STREET MOB/RANCHO HUMILDE/SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Dolido Pero No Arrepentido (EP)**	10
6	6	**Karol G** UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO/UMLE	**Manana Sera Bonito**	60
8	7	**Junior H** RANCHO HUMILDE/WARNER LATINA	**$ad Boyz 4 Life II**	28
5	8	**Shakira** SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran**	4
11	9	**Karol G** BICHOTA/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	**Manana Sera Bonito (Bichota Season)**	36
10	10	**Grupo Frontera** GRUPO FRONTERA	**El Comienzo**	38

SHABOOZEY: DANIEL PRAKOPCYK. FUERZA REGIDA: ANNA WEBBER FOR PENSKE MEDIA.

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

EMERGING ARTISTS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR DEVELOPING ARTISTS, USING THE SAME FORMULA AS THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING BILLBOARD ARTIST 100, WHICH MEASURES ARTIST ACTIVITY ACROSS MULTIPLE BILLBOARD CHARTS INCLUDING THE HOT 100 AND BILLBOARD 200. (THE ARTIST 100 LISTS THE MOST POPULAR ACTS OVERALL EACH WEEK.) HOWEVER, THE EMERGING ARTISTS CHART EXCLUDES ACTS THAT HAVE NOTCHED A TOP 25 ENTRY ON EITHER THE HOT 100 OR BILLBOARD 200, AS WELL AS ARTISTS THAT HAVE ACHIEVED TWO OR MORE TOP 10s ON *BILLBOARD'S* "HOT" SONG GENRE CHARTS AND/OR CONSUMPTION-BASED "TOP" ALBUM GENRE RANKINGS. TOP LATIN ALBUMS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR LATIN ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

NO. 1

Milestones For Hunt, Chesney

Sam Hunt (above) scores his 10th Country Airplay No. 1 with "Outskirts." The song increased by 15% to 33.2 million impressions April 12-18, according to Luminate. The track, which he co-wrote and co-produced, is his first leader since April 2022, when "23" became his fourth straight No. 1, after "Breaking Up Was Easy in the 90's" (May 2021), "Hard To Forget" (July 2020) and "Kinfolks" (February 2020).

Meanwhile, Kenny Chesney collects his 61st Country Airplay top 10 as "Take Her Home" lifts 11-9 (19.3 million, up 7%). He matches George Strait for the most top 10s since the chart's launch in January 1990. (Tim McGraw is third with 60.) Chesney last reached the tier as a featured artist on Kelsea Ballerini's "Half of My Hometown," which in March 2022 became his record-extending 32nd No. 1. He first hit the top 10 in June 1995 with the No. 6-peaking "Fall in Love." —JIM ASKER

Country Airplay

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title / IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	Artist	WKS. ON CHART
2	1	#1 for 1 WEEK GG **Outskirts** MCA NASHVILLE	Sam Hunt	39
1	2	**Man Made A Bar** MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	Morgan Wallen Featuring Eric Church	25
5	3	**Back Then Right Now** HUBBARD HOUSE/EMI NASHVILLE	Tyler Hubbard	32
6	4	**Tucson Too Late** MCA NASHVILLE	Jordan Davis	35
7	5	**Cab In A Solo** TRIPLE TIGERS	Scotty McCreery	35
8	6	**Pretty Little Poison** 717/WARNER/WEA	Warren Zeiders	41
4	7	**World On Fire** RCA NASHVILLE	Nate Smith	45
9	8	**Where It Ends** ELEKTRA/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WEA	Bailey Zimmerman	29
11	9	**Take Her Home** BLUE CHAIR/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WEA	Kenny Chesney	23
10	10	**Wildflowers And Wild Horses** BROKEN BOW	Lainey Wilson	23

NO. 1

Maggie Rogers Makes A New Memory

Rogers notches her fourth Triple A Airplay No. 1 with "Don't Forget Me." She previously led the list with "That's Where I Am" (one week in 2022), "Love You for a Long Time" (one, 2020) and "Light On" (three weeks, 2019).

Concurrently, Rogers' album *Don't Forget Me*, released April 12, debuts on multiple charts, paced by a No. 5 start on Top Album Sales with 10,000 copies sold in the United States through April 18. She adds her third top 10 on the chart, following *Surrender* (No. 6, August 2022) and *Heard It in a Past Life* (No. 1, one week, February 2019). The new set also opens at No. 6 on Americana/Folk Albums.

Another track from *Don't Forget Me* makes its chart entrance as "The Kill" debuts at No. 24 on Hot Alternative Songs and No. 34 on Hot Rock & Alternative Songs with 1.9 million official streams. —K.R.

Triple A Airplay

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title / IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	Artist	WKS. ON CHART
3	1	#1 for 1 WEEK **Don't Forget Me** DEBAY SOUNDS/CAPITOL/ICLG	Maggie Rogers	10
5	2	**Burial Ground** Y.A.B.B./THIRTY TIGERS	The Decemberists	9
1	3	**Good People** GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD/GLASSNOTE	Mumford & Sons & Pharrell Williams	13
4	4	**Mustang** LOVETAP/CAPITOL/ICLG	Kings Of Leon	8
7	5	**Ice Cream (Pay Phone)** ATO	Black Pumas	15
2	6	**Neon Pill** 110/RCA	Cage The Elephant	13
6	7	**Running** BLUE NOTE/CAPITOL/ICLG	Norah Jones	12
8	8	**Capricorn** SPRING SNOW/COLUMBIA	Vampire Weekend	9
11	9	**Love Of A Girl** RAMSEUR/AMERICAN/THIRTY TIGERS	The Avett Brothers	7
15	10	**Cardinal** MCA NASHVILLE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	Kacey Musgraves	4

HUNT: ALYSSE GAFKJEN. ROGERS: MAGGIE ROGERS.

AIRPLAY DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE COUNTRY AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY COUNTRY RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS, AS MEASURED BY MEDIABASE AND PROVIDED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. TRIPLE A AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY ADULT ALTERNATIVE RADIO AIRPLAY DETECTIONS, AS MEASURED BY MEDIABASE AND PROVIDED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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MUSIC AND MONEY

Broken Spell: What's Next For Hipgnosis?

As Concord and Blackstone vie to acquire the embattled song fund, Merck Mercuriadis' future with its investment adviser remains unclear

BY GLENN PEOPLES AND ELIZABETH DILTS MARSHALL

ILLUSTRATION BY REMIE GEOFFROI

THE CLOUDY FUTURE of Hipgnosis Songs Fund (HSF) became clearer on April 18, when the embattled company's board of directors publicly supported a $1.4 billion takeover bid by Concord, followed two days later by a $1.5 billion offer by investment giant Blackstone. Regardless of the buyer, an acquisition would mark an end to the 5-year-old London Stock Exchange-listed company and give shareholders an offramp after HSF faced questions about its operational acuity and, most recently, alleged evidence of accounting missteps that overstated both revenue and its portfolio's valuation. Concord's offer is a 32.2% premium over HSF's closing price on April 17, but the board said it would support Blackstone's offer — which represents a 41.8% premium — if the asset manager makes it official.

Blackstone's bid for the publicly traded music rights company wasn't a surprise: It owns two other entities under the Hipgnosis name. Blackstone is the majority owner of the public fund's investment adviser, Hipgnosis Song Management (HSM), and it funds Hipgnosis Songs Capital, a private music rights fund operated with HSM that has its own portfolio of music rights from such stars as Justin Bieber and Kenny Chesney. Sources say Blackstone's private fund, HSC, is worth upwards of $700 million. HSM has the right to buy HSF's portfolio if its advisory agreement is terminated — and Blackstone and HSM "will vigorously protect its interests should the company purport to terminate the [investment advisory agreement]," according to a statement issued by HSM on April 22. "We will use all means necessary to defend our contractual position and interests."

Neither HSF nor HSM responded to requests to comment for this story.

When investors vote on the proposed acquisition at HSF's June 10 board meeting, a majority of stockholders representing at least 75% of voting rights must approve the deal. Before Blackstone's offer, Concord's bid had the support of shareholders that own 29.4% of the company's equity.

Any offer would free the fund and its investors from a serious bind. Once a freewheeling darling of the music business that acquired rights to music by Red Hot Chili Peppers, Neil Young and Shakira, the company suffered from a struggling share price, the cancellation of the dividend and — the coup de grace — an unflattering due diligence report by investment bank Shot Tower Capital released March 28 that found the company's investment adviser, the Merck Mercuriadis-led

Opus Music Group is putting its music portfolio up for sale and seeking around $200 million for the package.

Spotify and **Amazon Music** both rolled out artificial intelligence-generated playlist features for select users.

Irving Azoff's Global Music Rights settled a copyright infringement lawsuit it brought against the **Vermont Broadcast Association**.

Taylor Swift's music catalog returned to **TikTok** ahead of the release of her album *The Tortured Poets Department*.

HSM, committed a series of missteps. Among them: HSM "materially overstated" annual revenue by improperly accounting for revenue and missed growth forecasts on 75% of the fund's catalogs by an average of 23% annually, and the investment adviser overstated the amount of control that HSF has over the rights it had acquired. The latter conclusion is key to the value of HSF's portfolio because owning a song's copyright is more valuable than owning a writer's or producer's share of the royalties it generates.

As a result of its findings, Shot Tower lowered HSF's portfolio value by 26%, from $2.62 billion to $1.95 billion.

HSM's response to the Shot Tower report, which it issued the same day, claimed that aspects of it were "factually inaccurate and misleading."

Not surprisingly, several of HSF's largest and most long-lasting investors were angered by the report's findings. Investment managers, some of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity because they did not want to comment publicly before the next board meeting, say that the report's findings presented extraordinary examples of gross incompetence and "myriad" accounting issues.

Stifel analyst Sachin Saggar, who raised red flags about the company's accounting and valuation in 2021, says the Shot Tower report revealed "a catalog of errors" that should have been prevented by the layers of protection — a board of directors, an independent auditor, internal systems and adherence to accounting principles — typically afforded to investors. "If you had a half-decent board at [the initial public offering], you [could] have stopped some of these things happening very easily because they're quite obvious and they were well-flagged by us three years ago."

While the offers could be the answer to HSF's financial straits, if the Concord bid gets accepted, one question remains: What becomes of Mercuriadis, who is the public face of Hipgnosis, the chairman of HSF's investment adviser and, until recently, the cocksure self-appointed spokesman for the red-hot song catalog sales market?

The Shot Tower report reinforced doubts that the board can continue to work with Mercuriadis and his team — one investor deems the relationship "broken down." Parting with him is easier said than done, however. Terminating the investment adviser's contract without cause would give HSM a termination fee and, more critically, an option to buy the entire portfolio at whichever is highest: fair market value, a third party's bid or the company's market capitalization.

According to the April 18 announcement, Concord would take over management of HSF's assets after "a brief transition period" during which Mercuriadis' HSM remained the investment adviser, overseeing roughly $700 million worth of catalogs, including those of Bieber, Chesney and Justin Timberlake. The announcement stated that the two sides have not begun discussions about terminating the investment advisory agreement.

Matt Hose, a London-based equity analyst for Jefferies, says the HSF board "is trying to highlight that Merck was incompetent so they can terminate [the investment adviser] with cause and not pay out the fees." He adds that this strategy would prevent Mercuriadis from "stopping the board from selling the portfolio in the open market and getting full value." Removing the investment adviser would be an unusual outcome. Hose says he has never seen an investment manager terminated for cause in the 15 years he has covered investment trusts.

HSF's largest investors support terminating the investment adviser's contract, but they were reticent to say that the board can prove it has sufficient reason to fire the investment manager "with cause."

"People are pretty fed up with the [investment] manager as a result of this [report]," one investment manager says. "There are some quite extraordinary allegations in this report. I don't think I've seen accusations of gross incompetence laid out in this way. I've seen accusations of fraud, but not this."

Hose points out that, counterintuitively, HSF's stock price rose 10% on the day the Shot Tower report was released. "Shareholders want termination for cause because it's the cleanest exit. Whether they're going to get it or not — that's the question."

If the board moves to terminate the investment manager with cause, investors say Mercuriadis and Blackstone may fight it in court. In such a scenario, they say the two sides would probably settle with HSF for a lump sum of money but not the right to buy the portfolio. They note that a prolonged court battle would bring Blackstone the kind of negative headlines it's known to avoid.

Other catalog portfolio managers say, bad press be damned, Blackstone will not give up its right to HSF's quality assets. "The underlying assets are solid, whether they paid one turn or two turns too much," says David Schulhof, CEO of music-focused exchange-traded fund MUSQ.

A Blackstone acquisition, on the other hand, would be the best outcome for Mercuriadis, as HSM would continue to oversee the portfolio. Regardless of how the aftermath plays out, half a dozen HSF investors and analysts said they cannot see Mercuriadis and HSM remaining the investment manager of a publicly traded fund or the fund continuing as a publicly listed entity.

Despite the enduring value of much of HSF's portfolio, the board is telling shareholders that a quick sale is their best option. In its April 18 announcement, the board indicated that accepting Concord's bid would "[mitigate] the risks we see ahead to achieving a material improvement in the share price." Other than an outright acquisition, it warned, "all alternative options carry significant risks, uncertainties and limitations." ◼

HIPGNOSIS PROGNOSIS

A timeline of events that led to the publisher and songs fund's current crisis

JULY 6, 2018
Hipgnosis Songs Fund starts trading on the London Stock Exchange's specialist fund segment with 202.2 million ordinary shares.

JULY 11, 2018
HSF acquires its first catalog, a 75% stake, from Terius Youngdell Nash (aka The-Dream), who retains the remaining 25%, for up to $23.75 million.

NOV. 2, 2018
HSF pays its first dividend of 0.5 pence ($.06) per share. Its Oct. 25 dividend announcement indicates it was targeting a 3.5 pence ($4.56) dividend for the first 12 months.

OCT. 26, 2023
HSF investors vote against continuation and reject the proposal to sell a portion of the public fund's catalog to the Blackstone-backed sister fund, Hipgnosis Songs Capital.

NOV. 23, 2023
HSF discloses that it, along with Merck Mercuriadis and investment manager Hipgnosis Songs Management, are being sued by Hipgnosis Music Limited. The lawsuit alleges Mercuriadis diverted business opportunities to HSF and HSM.

MARCH 4, 2024
HSF slashes the value of its portfolio by roughly 26% due to the discovery of multiple accounting errors, including double-counting accruals. The fund's stock sinks to an all-time low of 52.9 pence ($0.66).

MARCH 28, 2024
The HSF board releases Shot Tower Capital's due diligence report, which finds that the investment manager "materially overstated" revenue and earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization and its underwriting analysis for catalog acquisitions failed to meet music industry standards.

APRIL 26, 2024
On the six-month anniversary of HSF investors' no-continuation vote, the new board of directors releases the results of the strategic review and proposals for the future of the company for investors to vote on.

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billboard 2024
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The Orchard congratulates our colleagues and partners on their esteemed recognition.

Prashant Bahadur
Tricia Arnold
Erol Cichowski
Jason Pascal

THE ORCHARD THE ORCHARD THE ORCHARD

Spotify reported record-high profits and 239 million paid subscribers in the first quarter.

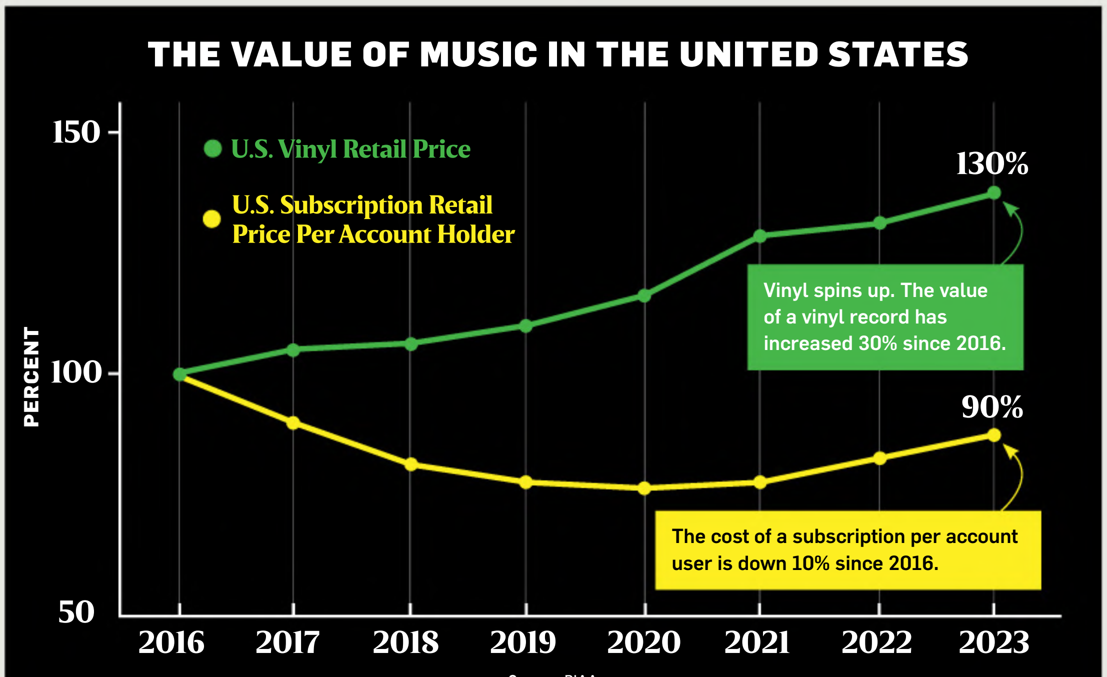
Pophouse acquired **KISS'** publishing, recording royalties and trademarks and will produce a KISS virtual show.

OP-ED

Vinyl Solution

The format will generate over $1 billion this year — so why aren't artists offering limited-edition releases that drop before the streaming date and harness the influence of superfans?

BY WILL PAGE AND FRED GOLDRING



Source: RIAA

A **TIME-TESTED REVENUE MODEL** in the theater and concert world is to price the front seats highest and sell them early to the act's dedicated followers, then fill out the house with cheap seats to optimize cash flow and lower risk. In gaming, at least since the days of Minecraft, superfans have been given early access to titles prior to their publication, generating revenue, feedback and word-of-mouth.

Movie studios use a similar model, charging about $11 per ticket for cinema screenings of major films roughly 45 days before they are widely available to stream (typically first as a purchase, then as a rental). Apple used this windowed approach to maximize revenue with *Killers of the Flower Moon* and *Napoleon*, as did Amazon Prime with *Air*.

Page

Goldring

The record industry seems to have missed the memo. When an album drops, an artist's music is immediately available on all streaming services, leaving no room for passionate fans to self-select into pricier options. Other than an early misfire trying out streaming exclusives on TIDAL, it doesn't use a windowed approach.

This is a huge missed opportunity.

One way for recorded music to open a more lucrative, superfan-based future is to turn to one of the icons of its past: vinyl records. Rapper Travis Scott figured this out, pressing 500,000 double-vinyl copies of his *Utopia* album and making it available the same day he dropped it on streaming services. Scott has now sold the majority of them at $50 a pop, taking the risk and reaping the reward.

But what if he had released those vinyl records before the album launched digitally? If he had sold half the stock before the digital release, he would have grossed $12.5 million, banking as much as $10 million, all while supercharging his marketing machine as his superfans paraded their prized product for their friends.

We've been told again and again that the resurgence in vinyl is a blip. Yet for 18 straight years, it has continued to surpass expectations. For the past three years, it has made up over a tenth of all label revenue from the consumer and this year will enable labels to reap over a billion vinyl dollars, with no slowdown in sight.

Now let's look at where the vinyl meets the road. While streaming is a success story, it's also a commoditization story — selling more and more for less and less. In 2001, Rhapsody charged $9.99 to access 15,000 catalog songs; today, Spotify, et al., charge roughly the same for 120 million songs. Add the impact of a family plan, where typically three people share an account for $15 each month and the value of an account user has fallen by 10% — and that's before adjusting for inflation.

Vinyl bucks this trend. Since 2016, retail prices for the platters that matter have risen 30% (see chart). For a streamer to provide labels the same amount of value from an album as a vinyl buyer, a customer would need to press "play" over 5,000 times — two weeks straight without sleep.

Let's be clear on what this comparison really means: Consumers are paying more for the same with vinyl but paying less to access more with streaming. So if you want to hedge your intellectual property bets, put some chips on black and spin the wheel at 33 1/3.

Management guru Peter Drucker once said, "The customer rarely buys what the company thinks it's selling him." In the case of vinyl, over half of buyers don't even own a record player. They're not buying the music — they're buying merchandise that gives them a sense of identity and connection to the artist.

A limited-edition package of Scott's *Utopia* on red vinyl.

There are similar conundrums concerning vinyl's relationship with the creator. Remember that streaming unbundled the album — so you could have nine filler songs on a smash No. 1 record yet not get paid for them. *Pivot: Eight Principles for Transforming Your Business in a Time of Disruption* showed that Gotye's 2011 debut, *Making Mirrors*, was the most-streamed album of the year, but it was all due to one hit: "Somebody I Used To Know." Strip that out and the record falls out of the top 100.

Vinyl captures more in unit value — no fan can realistically give your album $30 through streaming — and all songs receive the same payout. *Saturday Night Fever* is arguably the greatest vinyl success story in history, yet the obscure Ralph McDonald track "Calypso Breakdown" earned the same as the Bee Gees' signature track, "Staying Alive," for every copy sold. Supporting more vinyl releases stands to monetize the majority of songs that make almost no money from streaming.

Vinyl is not without its challenges. Recent changes by Luminate wiped off 40% of the measured volume overnight, by flipping from extrapolating market size to counting only those who opt in. That'll get fixed. However, if counting brick-and-mortar retail is hard, what about tracking online physical retail that's based anywhere yet serves everywhere? London-based Juno Records serves not just the United Kingdom and the United States, but Brazil and China in equal measure. Add secondhand platforms like Discogs and the true size of the market is a lot bigger than we give it credit for.

This returns us to the potential of vinyl's first-mover advantage. Until the latter part of 2023, the format faced an enormous manufacturing backlog, and demand far exceeded supply for even the biggest acts. Multiple vinyl albums were released many months after their initial streaming debut.

A rise of small vinyl manufacturing plants has significantly decreased lag time and backlog. Scott used the Poland-based team at Pressing Business to manufacture the double-disc, multicover, multicolored *Utopia* in just five weeks, allowing for the highest vinyl debut for a hip-hop artist since the introduction of Luminate in 1991. Combined with streaming, *Utopia* ruled the Billboard 200 for four weeks.

The record industry should start selling and delivering vinyl as an early-access opportunity, not an afterthought. Pre-streaming vinyl releases can create scarcity, exclusivity and therefore additional revenue from superfans who will jump at the chance to be the first to hear the music or own a limited-edition version. Artists will benefit creatively as well because superfans are the ones most likely to truly appreciate the album as a body of work, curated as the artist intended (and, many would argue, with better sound).

It's time for the industry to embrace the vinyl first-mover advantage that is hiding in plain sight.

Will Page is the author of Pivot: Eight Principles for Transforming Your Business in a Time of Disruption *and former chief economist of Spotify. Fred Goldring is an entrepreneur, entertainment lawyer and co-founder of Pressing Business.*

PAGE: ANJELICA BETTE FELLINI. GOLDRING: NATASHA FRADKIN. UTOPIA: COURTESY OF CACTUS JACK RECORDS.

Congratulations, Billboard International Power Players

Rebecca Berman
Kim Frankiewicz
Tina Funk
Fred Gillham
Jaime Gough
Jeff Van Driel

Your relentless dedication enables Concord artists to impact culture on a global a scale.

Blackpink member **Lisa** signed with **RCA Records** for solo recordings.

BMI announced its songwriters and publishers will receive a $100 million bonus following its sale to **New Mountain Capital**.

Ingram onstage at Observatory North Park in San Diego on March 7.

GENRE REPORT

OUT OF THE BLUES

With fewer clubs and iconic headliners, the business is in the process of reinventing itself with rising stars and a wider definition of the genre

BY STEVE KNOPPER

MIKE WHEELER SAYS HE HAS 16 GIGS lined up in April at clubs in his hometown of Chicago — a solid run but nowhere near the number he was playing before the pandemic. "Things are 50% normal," says the veteran singer-guitarist, who has performed with Buddy Guy, the late B.B. King and Koko Taylor. "[There are] more clubs open now, but mostly Wednesday through Sunday. We're trying to find the most gigs I can get in the city, but as far as tours and revenue, it's kind of limited."

Even in a blues mecca like Chicago, the genre has taken a significant hit over the past few years. Artists and club owners in musically vibrant cities cite numerous culprits — rising crime rates, the lingering pandemic-era habit of staying home, competition from nearby music festivals, home alcoholic-beverage delivery and the recent deaths of such headliners as Lonnie Brooks, Jimmy Johnson, James "Tail Dragger" Jones and members of The Kinsey Report.

"It is sporadic, to say the least," says Lisa Pellegrino, who manages Chi-town's famed Kingston Mines blues club. "I don't think anybody's having a banner year."

While Tony Mangiullo, founder and owner of nearby Rosa's Lounge, is more upbeat — "The business is good, that's all you need to know," he says — he acknowledges the pandemic changed fans' concert-going habits. "By 1:30, 2 in the morning, people are tired, the musicians are tired, and we're tired. In the past, you would have people staying late. I'm really hoping we go back to that."

Through its rickety constellation of indie labels, roadhouses and juke joints, the blues business is reinventing itself. Its biggest stars have died, retired or reduced their touring activity, leaving fewer headliners to carry festivals and weekend club dates. And while artists like Wheeler and clubs like Rosa's keep the lights on with hard-drinking customers, door fees and ticket sales, the pandemic and its aftermath have forced many to rethink their models.

Mangiullo has invested in livestreaming and hopes to release live album compilations this fall; venerable Chicago-blues indie label Alligator Records partnered in 2021 with a new music company, Exceleration Music — founded by former Concord Music Group CEO Glen Barros — to handle physical distribution and other functions; and a new generation of stars, from singer Shemekia Copeland to guitar hero Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, has expanded the playing field from traditional clubs to gigs at arts centers and festivals, social media and satellite radio.

U.S. streaming numbers for the genre have increased 41% since 2020, from 1.7 billion in 2020 to almost 2.5 billion last year, according to Luminate. (In comparison, Taylor Swift racked up 17.5 billion on her own.) But owners of indie blues labels say the revenue has little impact on their bottom lines. "It takes a lot of streams to make a nickel," M.C. Records owner Mark Carpentieri says. "Our better-known classic artists, like Hound Dog Taylor, Koko Taylor and Albert Collins, have a lot of life in the streaming services," says Bruce Iglauer, founder of 53-year-old Alligator Records. "Our lesser-known artists do not particularly benefit from them."

The genre remains reliant on touring, and if blues stars use social media to market to their older-skewing fan bases, they're more likely to use Facebook instead of TikTok. They also sell albums and CDs at gigs for autograph-seekers, and labels are scrambling to make as many titles as possible available on vinyl.

Ingram, whom Iglauer calls Alligator's "big success story," is a 25-year-old guitar hero who has grown into an international festival headliner, even though his most popular album, 2021's *662*, has just 9.3 million streams in the United States and has sold 29,000 copies. Many in the blues business point to him as the future, a young talent who can refresh the genre. At first, Ingram's friends were into hip-hop and didn't much care for blues; today, he tells *Billboard*, "I see a resurgence in young people liking it, especially young Black kids."

Ingram's manager, Ric Whitney, says blues artists are expanding their audiences by supplementing club gigs with shows at festivals, arts centers and other venues that feature a wider range of music genres and styles. "There are a lot more places that are open to booking blues talent that aren't necessarily blues clubs," he says.

Veteran blues-rock guitarist Joe Bonamassa, who estimates his post-pandemic ticket sales are "back and then some," says he has broadened his marketing efforts to rock fans who attend Foo Fighters, Eagles and Red Hot Chili Peppers shows. "We've always looked at it from the point of view [that], 'If Eric Clapton can pull 15,000 people in a market, there's clearly 15,000 people who like this kind of music,' " Bonamassa says. "It's a classic rock-/blues-based audience, and that's where you want to target."

Bonamassa suggests artists and clubs identify fan base demographics through Google Analytics and other data tools, then "laser-focus marketing to the people that love this shit." An effective blues cross-marketer has been Copeland, who uses her show on SiriusXM's Bluesville channel to promote her albums and steady weekend touring. "This year is going to be one of the best financially that she ever had," says her manager, John Hahn.

Others are struggling or modifying their business strategies. Terra Blues, the 34-year-old club in New York's Greenwich Village that books acoustic locals such as guitarists SaRon Crenshaw and Jr. Mack, relies on the lenience of a landlord. "If not for that, we probably would be closed," owner Ilan Elmatad says. "Bluesmen do not tour anymore. It's too expensive. These days, they're staying where they are, whether it's Mississippi or Arkansas. There are no blues clubs from Philadelphia to Montreal. We're the only one."

The departure of reliable artists from the touring circuit, whether they've retired or died, led Austin talent buyer Zach Ernst to rethink his approach to booking acts at Antone's Nightclub and the Austin Blues Festival. For years, the club's late founder, Clifford Antone, was strict about sticking to traditional artists, but Ernst says he's "lucky if I can do one or two blues shows a month." And whereas blues festivals throughout the United States once relied on straight-down-the-middle artists from Luther Allison to Koko Taylor, the Austin Blues Festival has expanded its lineup beyond the genre, much like the New Orleans Jazz Festival in recent years. This year's festival stars Buddy Guy (whom Ernst calls "the last Chicago blues headliner, period"), Brittany Howard and blues-adjacent acts from Big Freedia to Dumpstaphunk.

"Everywhere, promoters are dealing with: 'How do you deal with an aging fan base? How do you deal with a reduced number of headliners that are appealing to the baby boomer generation?' " Ernst says. "We don't get too prescriptive by explaining exactly what we're doing. We're just like, 'Hey, this is great music. Have a great time.' "

DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES

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AEG PRESENTS

Universal Music Group signed a deal for the exclusive distribution rights to **HYBE** artists for the next 10 years.

Tennessee adopted the ELVIS Act, a bill designed to protect artists from deepfakes.

ROBLOX AND FORTNITE: THE NEW TIKTOKS?

The music industry is working to crack the code for promoting artists and generating revenue for them

BY ELIAS LEIGHT

Artists with a presence on Roblox include (clockwise from left) Blackpink, Nicki Minaj, Cher, John and Rodrigo.

IN NOVEMBER, the gaming platform Roblox announced that it had passed a threshold of more than 70 million average daily active users. While it still remains largely known to teens and their parents, industry supporters consider massive gaming hubs like it and Fortnite as the new frontier of social media — another space where musicians will need to establish a presence if they hope to remain commercially relevant.

"Just the way every artist has an Instagram account and a TikTok, eventually everyone's going to have a Roblox presence," predicts Nic Hill, co-founder of Sawhorse Productions, which has worked on Roblox projects for Olivia Rodrigo and Elton John. Spotify, iHeartMedia and Warner Music Group (WMG) have all launched Roblox experiences, and Sony Music has an in-house team developing music-focused games or experiences for Roblox and Fortnite. (The latter boasts of having more than half a billion player accounts.)

In Roblox, players create an avatar and access an ecosystem of millions of games, many of which were developed by creative teenagers rather than established gaming companies. Its gamers — nearly half of whom are female — devote an average of 2.5 hours a day to roaming Roblox's virtual byways and pay to acquire Robux, a currency that lets them buy assorted items for their avatars.

Fortnite, in contrast, came to prominence as a fight-to-the-death survival game. Its audience skews older than Roblox's and is male-dominated, but the platform is working to diversify its appeal. Most notably, in March 2023, Epic Games launched Unreal Engine for Fortnite, allowing creators to develop their own worlds and experiences and make them available to Fortnite players, similar to the user-generated flair of Roblox.

Initially, the music industry's main way of engaging with Roblox and Fortnite audiences was through virtual concerts by artists such as Lil Nas X and Travis Scott. But virtual shows are huge undertakings that often require six months or more to develop and fine-tune, according to sources who have worked on them. As a result, concerts make sense primarily for a small number of big-name acts. In Roblox, sources say, putting together a Roblox shop may take closer to four to six weeks and "can have a lot more longevity" than a one-time concert, says Ricardo Briceno, chief business officer of Gamefam, which built Harmony Hills, the home of WMG's Roblox concerts.

Tony Barnes, founder of Karta, which worked on a popular Roblox "fan hub" for TWICE — where supporters of the K-pop group can play games, hang out virtually and buy digital goods for their avatars — advises clients to think of the platform as "a new community channel that needs to be nurtured," he says. "You need to maintain your engagement."

Roblox and Fortnite incentivize artists and labels to treat them as revenue generators. Artists can sell virtual merchandise on Roblox that players use to customize their avatars. The creator of the item takes home 30%, the creator of the experience — which could also be the artist — where the item is sold gets 40%, and the platform takes 30%.

Briceno sold ice antlers for Cher, for example, while TWICE has sold more than 3 million emotes, and a John emote was purchased over 1.5 million times, according to a Roblox representative. Gavin Johnson, director of syncs and partnerships at electronic music label Monstercat, oversaw the sale of a limited-edition ruby pendant necklace for 1,000,001 Robux (around $10,000) — "the highest primary sale ever on the platform."

In Fortnite, if a label creates its own customized gameplay environment, known as an "island," it receives an "engagement payout." (Roblox also offers these.) Compensation amounts to "40% of the net revenue from Fortnite's Item Shop," according to Epic Games' website. It is then disbursed among island creators according to a complex calculation based on an island's ability to attract new and dormant players and keep them engaged.

Hill says the music industry is now in a period that he calls "a constant test and learn" with Roblox and Fortnite; some projects have generated substantial revenue, while others are lucky to break even.

Competition is already fierce. "Roblox is becoming a crowded space," Hill says. "Even if you're a popular name and you show up, you can't just expect everyone to be so excited and find you."

Artists and labels often find it easier to jump into Roblox than Fortnite. In Roblox, "basically anyone can create anything and sell it," Briceno says. Fortnite "doesn't allow studios or creators to sell items in-game," says Michael Herriger, co-founder of Atlas Creative, which built iHeartMedia's Roblox environment. "Everything that is a Fortnite skin [an outfit to customize a player's look in the game], for example, comes directly from the Epic Games store," so artists and labels have to work with the company.

Activations like these can help raise awareness of an artist and drive "fan culture," as Barnes puts it, but may not involve the act's actual music. Artists and labels are still trying to figure out what an effective music integration might look like.

Sony Music recently unveiled a Fortnite game called Nitewave, where winners of a capture-the-flag-like experience get to control the soundtrack that features Sony artists such as Flo Milli and Calvin Harris.

In March, Universal Music Group and Republic Records announced the launch of Boombox. Developed by gaming and music platform STYNGR, the virtual boombox offers precleared major-label music that players can use for their avatars.

In early Roblox experiments, around 20% of players are choosing to test Boombox, which is ad-supported for now, and power users are spending up to three times longer in games when it is activated. "People stay longer in games if they like what they're listening to," STYNGR co-founder and COO Alex Tarrand says. "Our thesis is that recorded music makes stuff better."

BLACKPINK, MINAJ, RODRIGO, JOHN: COURTESY OF ROBLOX. CHER: COURTESY OF GAMEFAN.

EMPIRE

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2024 INTERNATIONAL POWER PLAYERS

Ong photographed April 15 at TaP Music in Los Angeles.

From The Desk Of... Wendy Ong

GLOBAL CO-PRESIDENT/CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, TAP MUSIC

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY YASARA GUNAWARDENA

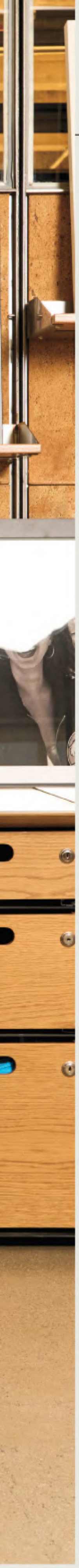
AS A FORMER executive at music companies in Singapore, Hong Kong, New York and Los Angeles, Wendy Ong certainly has the globe-trotting credentials to help a roster of music artists including Lana Del Rey, Ellie Goulding and Noah Cyrus navigate an increasingly global business. But Ong charted the flight path she took to her current role as global co-president/chief marketing officer of the artist management and publishing company TaP Music largely on her own because, she says, mentors for an Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) music executive were virtually nonexistent then.

As a result, Ong — who was raised in Malaysia and Singapore and worked at BMG, Arista, RCA, the Metropolitan Opera, EMI, Capitol, Interscope and Roc Nation — says she makes it a priority to be one herself, particularly for Asians and Asian Americans. Her mentorship has been aided by her participation in Gold House — a community of Asian Pacific entrepreneurs, creatives and other leaders — after, she says, she was invited to one of the organization's dinners "by accident." She adds that when opportunity presents itself, "it depends on what you do with it."

Ong sat down with *Billboard* to discuss the continued importance of music festivals, the work of Gold House and the promise of artificial intelligence (AI), among other topics.

Lana Del Rey returned to Coachella this year as a headliner. Do festival bookings still move the needle?
When you're strategic about it, it allows you to make getting into smaller markets cost-effective. It's hard to do proper global touring these days, and even in the U.S., festivals allow an artist to complement their overall touring strategy. From the TaP perspective, it's still a very key component, especially for developing artists. It's the same reason that collaborations work because it's crossing over to other artists' audiences. And not just for young people. I'm supposed to be the jaded music executive, but I'm not. The Justice set [at Coachella] blew me away. I actually went and checked immediately [to see if they're touring] because I wanted to see it again.

Prior to Coachella, what other major wins has TaP scored in the past 12 months?
Ellie [Goulding] is one of the most multifaceted artists anywhere. She had a No. 1 single and album last year [with "Miracle" featuring Calvin Harris and fifth full-length *Higher Than Heaven*] in the same week in the U.K. That was stunning. And Caroline Polachek's album [*Desire, I Want To Turn Into You*, which debuted at No. 9 on *Billboard*'s Top Album Sales chart]. I love that Caroline and Mookie Singerman, who manages her, have been together since the beginning of [Polachek's former band] Chairlift. There's something to be said for loyalty. Sometimes when an artist gets bigger, they feel they need to switch up their teams. They are the CEO of their own company, so they need to make tough calls



Spotify named **Christian Luiga** its new CFO, replacing **Paul Vogel**.

Range Media Partners secured a substantial minority investment from a group including **Liberty Global**.

sometimes. But it's nice to see those that remain loyal.

How are label layoffs affecting management?
Significantly. I always look to partner with our major labels in the best possible way, and when things are up in the air, it makes it very challenging to understand how much support we're going to have. The company that [TaP co-CEOs] Ben [Mawson] and Ed [Millett] have built is very much on the ethos of self-sufficiency. Going back to Lana, at the beginning of her career, they had a lot of pushback. She signed to Universal Germany because nobody believed in her. And that was and still is today a big takeaway for how we function as a company. We try to do as much for our artists as we can without overly relying on third parties, whether it's a label, a brand, a social [platform] or a [digital service provider]. We need that agency to be able to make a difference.

What does that entail today?
All anybody wants to talk about right now is superfans. And it's such a wake-up call. Fans want that close, direct relationship with the artist, and we were all slow in realizing that we need to take control of this relationship. We, as a management company, have made big strides in CRM [customer relationship management]. We have someone employed specifically at our company to do CRM. We're platform agnostic, whether that's OpenStage or Community or Laylo. What is important for us is to be able to take back the data. I say "data," but that's the fans. Artists need to be able to talk to their fans directly, and I think we're leading the charge on the management side. It's a testament to how [much] we value our artists' fans.

You've talked about not having a mentor in the industry. When you switched to management, was it even more apparent?
It was glaring. I wish that wasn't my answer, by the way. I wish I could say that, "Oh, yeah. So-and-so really lifted me up and helped me out so much."

Ong's great-grandmother, with whom she lived in Malaysia while attending preschool, gave her this pendant.

After Ong spearheaded a *Fifty Shades of Grey* classical compilation at EMI, she says author E L James' lawyer sent her a cease-and-desist notice. "I flew to London," she says, and successfully proposed releasing *Fifty Shades of Grey: The Classical Album*, which put her on the radar of radio departments at Capitol when programmers called to say, " 'We heard you released a BDSM classical album.' "

A sweatshirt embroidered with the face of Ong's recently deceased dog, Patches, whom she rescued 16 years ago on the island of Tobago and "was my rock through and through."

Younger people, whether it's on social media or in real life, often reach out to me, and I do my best to play whatever small part I can because I think that my path may have been a little less rocky if I had more guidance early in my career. And the very reason I had no mentors is because there weren't enough people that looked like me when I was coming up in the industry. Now there's K-pop, so that has changed things in the best possible way.

How does Gold House encourage more mentorship and visibility of the AAPI community in music?
With Gold House, I think it's the first time that I became a part of something greater for the AAPI community. It makes it easier to give back and to spotlight minority communities like ours. I'm also very proud to be part of the Gold House Music Accelerator program. The spotlight K-pop has put on the AAPI community is wonderful, but being a judge on the Gold House Music Accelerator program helps to shine a light on other types of artists, whether it's indie-rock or R&B.

Why has K-pop become an umbrella term in the United States for all Asian music right now?
Because we're dealing with the greater media that is not Asian, it eclipses all these other interesting artists and music that's coming out from countries like Indonesia and the Philippines and Taiwan. Nowhere else in the world would you put South Asians, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Filipinos, Indonesians all under one umbrella. It makes no sense outside of America. We have to do it in this country because we're all minorities and we can have a bigger voice if we band together. It's a challenge, though, because K-pop has changed so much of what we think pop music looks like. So now that we have a sliver of an opening, I hope that we get to demonstrate through Gold House efforts, for example, other types of music made by Asians.

What genre would you like to see gain prominence?
I'm so excited about South Asian Desi music. It is so much fun and joy and rhythm and bass. That joyousness is similar to how I view a lot of Latin music. It's inevitable that a Desi artist is going to break through, and I'm excited for that to find its way into America.

TaP has its publishing, philanthropic, fashion and sports divisions, but is there another sector you would love to see the company tackle in the future?
I am very excited and a huge advocate for all the positive changes that AI can bring. But I also have that personality of an early adopter. I think that in two years' time the music industry is going to look extremely different — maybe more so on the publishing side because that's where it's the most scary. When things are challenging, that is when opportunity comes. It's whether we can find a way to leverage it.

Outside of new music, what are you looking forward to this year?
The Gold Music Alliance. It was really encouraging when [the organization] had the chance to do the event around the Grammys this year. It was the first experience for me as a member of the Recording Academy to realize that there was interest in growing the AAPI membership base. Because I don't think we're very represented.

Do you think that will change with this year's nominations?
In 2023, two AAPI trustees were elected to the academy's national board of trustees. I think that is a sign that we are getting more representation. And I want to use my platform to encourage more AAPIs to become members of the Recording Academy. I know K-pop dominates in terms of consumption, but recognition is what I'm speaking about. I would be really excited to see a non-fan-voted award with K-pop. We should be represented not just in *Billboard* sales charts, but also in critical acclaim. Once again, I hope that K-pop forges the path for other types of Asian music.

The academy added a best African music performance category this year. Would you like to see a similar addition for K-pop?
How amazing would that be, but it's a double-edged sword. Like, why isn't K-pop just part of pop? It's [like asking] why is there a best actor and a best actress at the Oscars? Sometimes I think it's necessary because we can't [bestow] the right amount of acclaim and recognition by putting everyone in the same bucket. We'll see more changes due to AI than we'll see anything else. I wish technological advances could help advance this type of conversation — maybe that's the challenge. ■

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SHINE BRIGHT LIKE A DIAMOND

New girl group VVS, helmed by hit-maker Paul Thompson, is about to upend expectations of K-pop's sound and approach

BY JEFF BENJAMIN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SCOTT JOONHYUK JUNG

From left: Liwon, Brittney, Rana, Jiu and Ilee of VVS photographed April 15 at Brakio Studio in Seoul.

From left: Liwon, Rana, Brittney, Jiu and Ilee.

I HAD MY OWN vision for what I wanted to hear in K-pop," says Paul Thompson, an Italian American who 11 years ago moved to South Korea from California to teach English, but has since become better known as chart-topping K-pop producer MCMZ and founder of MCMZ Inc., an entertainment group based in Seoul. "I knew no other company was 100% going to let me do the vision I had. It was time for me to try to evolve K-pop."

Enter VVS, Thompson's newly formed group eyeing October for its official debut, and with four albums already mapped out. Embodying his love for The Neptunes, Timbaland co-producer Danja and singer-songwriter-producer Ryan Leslie, Thompson created a streamlined sound for the new act, which is named after the diamond category of the same name. "I would say we're mashing up Ariana [Grande's] 'POV' and Nicki Minaj," says Thompson, who calls the members of VVS "the right five to push K-pop forward."

With one Japanese and four Korean members, VVS comprises Brittney (20, the group's leader and English speaker), Ilee (19, a rapper inspired by Blackpink's Jennie), Rana (18, the main dancer who is musically influenced by Lauryn Hill), Jiu (15, the main vocalist who looks up to K-pop powerhouse Taeyeon) and Liwon (15, a vocalist who admires fellow teen singer Kiana).

For now, the quintet has daily rehearsals, vocal and rap lessons, and group workouts. As their debut looms closer, the members will move into a shared living space and add media training and language lessons as part of K-pop's famous trainee system. But unlike other trainees, the members of VVS will have had what Brittney and the girls call "culture classes" to dig into the roots of R&B and hip-hop.

"From the cultural beginnings to today where female rappers are able to perform onstage with such confidence, the fact that we are able to learn about the history of the OGs is really meaningful," Ilee says through a translator. "We learned about female rappers at the start of the hip-hop industry, like Lil' Kim, who influences me because she's very confident."

Meanwhile, Brittney — who nearly abandoned her K-pop dreams after time training in two different agencies before joining MCMZ — pulls inspiration from an act closer to home. "BTS came from a small company," she says. "We come from a small company, too, so I think there's a lot that we can learn from them. They're very hard workers, they put all their effort into their job, and when they perform onstage, they're 100%. I think their teamwork is amazing, so I tell my girls about them, too."

After initially moving to South Korea to teach English, Thompson spent the following decade becoming the chart-topping K-pop producer MCMZ for arena-filling acts like EXO, NCT and Kang Daniel. Similar to NewJeans mastermind Min Hee Jin and other K-pop creatives who have moved from the liner notes to the C-suite, Thompson transformed his producer moniker into a corporate entity, founding MCMZ Inc. in early 2019 and incorporating as a Korean entity in January 2020 with an all-Korean staff and crop of songwriters that includes K-pop idol Yuju and lyricists in Los Angeles and Nashville.

> **"IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO TRY TO EVOLVE K-POP."**
>
> **—PAUL THOMPSON, MCMZ INC.**

Thompson's own body of work — alongside key hires of management, casting and artist development veterans in Korea — quickly earned his new label the trust of the industry. Blackpink's agency, YG Entertainment, has already invested in the company through a deal with its distribution division, YG Plus, to assist in merchandising and marketing, as well as global distribution.

And despite operating as an Italian American in a predominantly Asian industry, Thompson says, "All the parents know what I've done, all the trainees know, and a lot of them audition because of the music. They realize, 'OK, the company is still Korean, all the contracts are done in Korean, it just happens that the CEO is not.' "

Despite its American influences, MCMZ Inc. plans to target the international K-pop fandom as well as the scene's core markets like Korea, Japan and English-speaking territories. "It's going to be harder for us to get across because all the big companies have way more money than us to put toward marketing," Thompson says. "The best way we can market ourselves is to go through other channels where we don't have to put a huge budget behind that."

That's exactly why he has made yet another unconventional move: welcoming Anderson Cooper to film a CNN documentary about MCMZ Inc. to air at a later date. Thompson believes embracing such an unfiltered approach during a time of creative experimentation points to the type of ambition needed to break through industry hierarchies.

"They're already going to be questioning if we're authentically Korean," Thompson says. "A lot of the Korean companies' first target demographic is going to be Korea. For us, it's still Korea, but we know we have a barrier there to entry anyway, so let's see how we can market ourselves more accurately [beyond that]."

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Q & A

Beatty

Spurring On *Cowboy Carter*

EVEN BEFORE THE release of Beyoncé's chart-topping album *Cowboy Carter*, Ryan Beatty was already having a banner 2024. His name is in the liner notes to Bleachers' self-titled fourth album as a co-writer, and he'll open for Noah Kahan this summer and Maggie Rogers in the fall — all in support of his own acclaimed 2023 third album, *Calico*, which earned praise from Elton John. But his contributions to *Cowboy Carter* have been quietly in the works throughout his wins, extending across the past four years. Beatty, a California native and teen pop prodigy turned tender singer-songwriter, is credited with co-writing four songs on the blockbuster, including standouts "Bodyguard" and "II Hands II Heaven." A closely guarded secret he has kept since 2020 (Beatty, 28, says he "worked on this pretty much from beginning to end"), his collaboration proved to be an inspirational boost. "It gave me this silent confidence for years," he says. "I think when you're patient through the process, you almost feel ready for all the things that happen."

You were working on *Cowboy Carter* and *Calico* simultaneously. What was it like deciding which ideas and lyrics should be for which albums?

There was never a moment where I thought, "Should this go here or there?" Anytime I went in to work on music, it was very intentional to focus on where things existed. At the end of the day, my writing is going to be my writing. But it never blended too much; it was always "I'm making this song for *Calico*," or "I'm making this song for *Cowboy Carter*." I felt really propelled in my artistry and could feel myself growing as an artist, so working on something of such magnitude at that time also helped hone in on my album. I always call *Calico* a small record because it's so close to the chest, and it's really interesting being in both those worlds. Knowing that [*Cowboy Carter*] will be heard by every person on Earth, whereas on my record I'm whispering into the mic, I kind of enjoyed that.

How did you keep *Cowboy Carter* a secret for so long?

It was hard, but I also sort of enjoyed it. There were people in my life who didn't know until the day it came out. I got phone calls and texts all day, like, "What are you talking about?" The entire time I wanted to honor what was being made, and I really believe in letting the work speak for itself. Not having expectations is the best move.

Your work is usually autobiographical. How does that affect your writing for other artists?

I put my own perspective into these songs. Even on a song like "Just for Fun," [Beyoncé] sings about Clovis, which is the town I grew up in [in California]. So if you really look into the details of it, you can hear my perspective in there, I think.

What did you learn from working with her and her team?

She makes things with so much intention, and I've always tried to do the same thing. Just seeing the work that goes into it definitely reminded me, "Oh, this is how you make greatness." That was incredible to be around, and I felt highly respected through the entire process. —ROB LEDONNE

INSIDE LOOK

Speed Of Sound

Joe LaPorta understands the fast-paced nature of rap music. "[When I left New York University], the industry was completely different," says the 44-year-old mastering engineer who has worked with everyone from Imagine Dragons to Miley Cyrus to, most recently, Future and Metro Boomin. "It was still a physical medium. There were a lot more planned releases. There wasn't this freedom of being able to release things within a day of creating it."

Future and Metro Boomin are both comfortable moving at today's pace. The longtime collaborative duo recently released two albums less than a month apart, *We Don't Trust You* and *We Still Don't Trust You*. The GrandStand engineer began working with Metro Boomin nearly a decade ago, when the latter made his collaborative album *Savage Mode* with Atlanta MC 21 Savage. From there, LaPorta was consistently tapped to work on several other projects by the in-demand producer thanks to Metro's "right-hand man," Ethan Stevens, a recording engineer with executive producer credits to his name.

LaPorta says the two artists wanted their latest full-lengths to feel like throwback Future releases, incorporating dusty soul samples and '80s boom bap while retaining Future's classic trap sound. "We have this cool collaborative process where he hears how I master it, he may make some adjustments, I might have some suggestions for him," LaPorta says. "We work really well like that."

It's a good thing to be that dialed in because whenever a project pops up, LaPorta says it's usually coming out soon. His goal with the Future and Metro projects — both of which debuted atop the Billboard 200, with *We Don't Trust You* charting a multiweek Billboard Hot 100 No. 1 with "Like That" — was to make sure "everything is very consistent from track to track ... There's nothing more boring than a record that doesn't have those ups and downs. [It's] a good ride, and it's constantly changing. That's what's so cool about these records."

—DAMIEN SCOTT

LaPorta

BEATTY: LUCAS CREIGHTON. LAPORTA: ANDREW LIPOVSKY.

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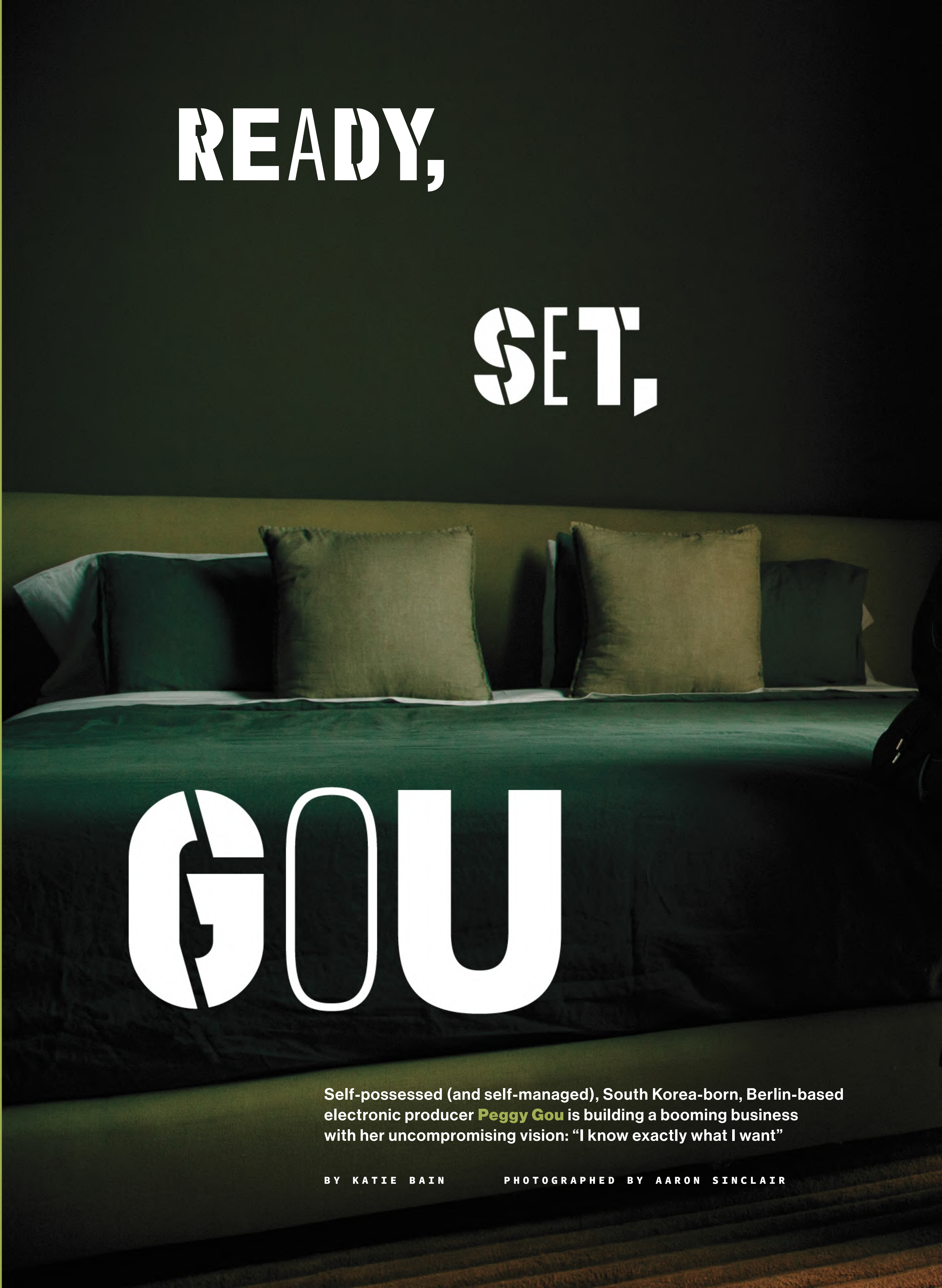

READY, SET, GOU

Self-possessed (and self-managed), South Korea-born, Berlin-based electronic producer **Peggy Gou** is building a booming business with her uncompromising vision: "I know exactly what I want"

BY KATIE BAIN   PHOTOGRAPHED BY AARON SINCLAIR

Gou photographed March 26
at Maison Celeste in Mexico City.

Styling by Jocelyn Corona
Sentimiento tracksuit, Tercer Mundo vest,
Cruda shoes, Ayanegui earrings and necklace.

Bottega Veneta coat, Ayanegui earrings.

ON A HULKING GRAY building on a wide boulevard once bisected by the Berlin Wall, a silver call button grants access to an expansive, shadowy, unfurnished foyer. Ascend a winding set of stairs and open the door at the top, and you'll find the office of the CEO: South Korea-born Peggy Gou, who has swiftly become the world's most in-demand female DJ-producer working in dance music today.

Inside Gou HQ, the bright overhead lights contrast with the early-April rain outside. The sprawling room — which has a vibe that's more "friend's apartment" than sterile corporate sanctum — is outfitted with a wooden meeting table, full bookshelves and a plush green velvet couch from which Tasos Filippou, Gou's touring manager, arises to serve Gou and me black coffee in little terra cotta mugs on peace sign-shaped coasters. Gou wears baggy jeans, a black sweater that covers her many tattoos and sunglasses with silver reflective lenses that offer only occasional glimpses of her eyes. Her hair is piled in a loose bun, her skin is flawless, and even in casual mode, she's giving cool-girl glamour. She offers a quick handshake, closes the window to make sure the room is quiet, then sits down to attend to business.

In the last 12 days, her slick brand of house has taken her to Miami, Mexico City and Buenos Aires. Of course, it's not unusual for DJs to party hop across continents — what's less typical for a DJ is having an office. But Gou's story is defined by a business acumen that could be characterized as corporate hustle if it didn't also happen inside dark techno clubs.

A Korean woman in a scene dominated by white men, Gou, 32, has orchestrated her own dizzying rise, immersing herself in Berlin's electronic scene upon moving here 10 years ago, then ascending to white-hot producer/fashion tastemaker thanks to last summer's viral single, and her first *Billboard* chart hit, "It Goes Like (Nanana)." This new ubiquity — ever-higher billing at the world's major music festivals, a German *Vogue* cover, a 2024 BRIT Award nomination for international song of the year — has neatly teed up Gou's debut album, *I Hear You*, coming June 7 through eminent indie label XL Recordings.

The rare self-managed marquee artist, Gou has achieved much of her success on her own, and the room we're sitting in functions as an extension of the command center in her mind.

"I remember meeting managers who told me, 'I can make your life easier,' " Gou recalls. "I was like, 'How? Tell me.' Even if you take care of all these emails, you still have to come back to me because no one can make decisions for me. Every decision has to come from me."

These decisions have produced an expansive business that includes heavy touring; A-list brand deals; her label, Gudu Records; and a merchandise line, Peggy Goods. With strong fan bases across continents, Gou will next be raising her profile even more in the United States ahead of and beyond *I Hear You*'s release.

"Because Peggy has such an incredible touring footprint globally," XL Recordings head of U.S. campaigns Laura Lyons says, "in the U.S., we're in a position where, because we haven't historically had her in the market as much, we need to build on the moments when she's here in person and also translate the excitement of an international, globe-trotting DJ to the local market."

One week and 6,000 miles later, the odds will look clearly in Gou's favor.

THE FIRST TIME GOU played Coachella, in 2018, the line to get into her show wrapped around the at-capacity Yuma Tent where she was performing at three in the afternoon. "Even one person not being able to see my set, that upsets me," she says. "So I was like, 'Maybe next time, I play a bigger stage.' "

On the first night of the 2024 festival, that "maybe" has become a firm "for sure." Gou presides over the Sahara Tent — Coachella's biggest and most established dance music mecca — from atop a towering stage as an emoji version of herself smiles at the audience from massive LED screens. With the newly expanded Sahara Tent stretching 320 feet, not including spillover — almost a football field long — it's likely Gou's crowd is the largest ever assembled to see a female producer in Coachella history. (After the set, she shares Instagram Stories of herself backstage hanging with J Balvin, getting chummy with Will Smith and then getting a burger from an In-N-Out somewhere in the Coachella Valley.)

In March, Gou made her debut at Miami's Ultra Music Festival, and in May, she'll play dance mega-festival EDC Las Vegas for the first time. These shows, "from a perception point of view," Lyons says, "are going to broaden [her] audience from this more underground electronic fan to a more mainstream kind of electronic base."

That might be anathema to some purists, particularly those steeped in the techno-as-religion culture of Berlin. But Gou has been able to maintain her underground cred even while blowing up. The early-April screening of the music video for *I Hear You*'s third single, "1+1=11," happened at a smoky Berlin club where the techno went until 3 a.m. on a Wednesday, and her friend group includes revered producers like Four Tet and Floating Points, whom she was recently hanging with in Mexico City. "I love those guys," she says. "So nerdy. Like, 'Guys, stop talking about how fat your drum is.' "

I suggest to Gou that her underground pedigree, paired with a forthcoming debut album that's refreshingly accessible, might make her uniquely well-suited for the United States, where the so-called "underground" styles of house and techno have become the scene's prevailing commercial forces in the live space. For her, that idea is beside the point. "Some people are like, 'She's really underground,' or 'She's commercial,' " Gou says. "I don't care. I'm just going to keep doing my thing and you can say what you want."

Growing up in South Korea's third-most populous city, Incheon — where she was born Kim Min-ji — Gou listened to "shit," "good music" and "everything." She lived in the shadow of her older brother, who's "like super genius, one of the crazy Mensa IQ people." Meanwhile, "Study wasn't my thing. I was kind of rebel. So if you tell me to stay here, I will not stay there. If you tell me to go, I will stay. I didn't like people telling me what to do even from when I was a kid."

Her parents, recognizing that their 14-year-old was not "doing well" in South Korea, asked if she wanted to study English in London; she did. In the United Kingdom, Gou lived with guardians but snuck out to parties, fostering a clubbing habit that matriculated with her into the London College of Fashion. She began DJ'ing, booked her own residency at a club in Shoreditch, finished school, moved to Berlin and worked at a record store by day while she was indoctrinated into techno by night. "After one month, I'm like, 'OK,' " she says flatly of her first trips to the city's notoriously exclusive techno institution, Berghain. "Three months later" — her voice grows louder and more forceful — " '*OK*.' Five months later, I was like, 'I finally get it.' "

By 2016, she was making her own music, and by 2018, revered dance label Ninja Tune was releasing it. She started her own Gudu Records in 2019; that same year, she released the groovy house track "Starry Night," which featured her singing in Korean and became a dance world hit.

All the while, she was touring. As her own manager, "I was the only person who was pushing me," she says. "I didn't need to be there. I didn't have to do that. I think I got hyped. I got too excited about the shows and getting many shows." In 2019, she played in 25 countries, including some, like Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, that are far from the well-trod dance world circuit.

"Imagine a bullet train," Gou says, speaking rapidly. "This was me in 2019. When it stopped, it didn't stop slowly; it had to stop super fast."

When the pandemic started, she returned to South Korea and spent three months at home — the longest amount of time she had been with her family since she was 14. She recharged even as life in South Korea — which introduced what many considered one of the world's best COVID-19 control programs — continued without large-scale lockdowns. ("Asian culture is different because when you have a flu, you wear a mask," she says, "so it was not that difficult for Asian people to keep the rules.")

In Incheon, Gou had the time and head space to focus on music. She echoes a pandemic-related refrain prevalent among DJs who tour heavily: "It was a hard time for a lot of people, but for me, it was one of the best things that happened to me."

She kept working upon her return to Berlin in mid-2020, finding that the '90s dance music she was listening to during the pandemic had "changed my taste." While she had been making her debut album for a while, she decided to make '90s dance the center of the project, evident in the interplay of the bass and chimes on a track like "Lobster Telephone," which sounds like it's sprinkled with powdered sugar. The "It Goes Like (Nanana)" bassline is pure *Jock Jams* — the 1995 compilation that introduced a generation of suburban adolescents to dance music — and has helped the song aggregate 72.2 million on-demand official U.S. streams and 565.3 million on-demand official global streams to date, according to Luminate. Altogether, the album, on which she sings in both Korean and English, is dance music distilled down to its most polished essentials — and you don't have to be a hardcore fan of the genre to get into it.

The sonic opposite of EDM maximalism, *I Hear*

HAIR BY PRESTON WADA AT RARE CREATIVES. ON-SITE PRODUCTION BY 2PM ESTUDIO.

Sentimiento top, Tiempos pants, Tercer Mundo belt, Frank Zapata shoes, Ayanegui necklace.

"Some people are like, 'She's really underground,' or 'She's commercial.' I don't care. I'm just going to keep doing my thing and you can say what you want." —GOU

BATAN CHAIRS BY TALLER BATAN

Cueva top and skirt, Ket Void jacket, Cruda shoes.

You may very well represent the future of main-stage electronic music. "In my career, I never once thought, 'I'm on the next level now,' " she says. "Only when 'Nanana' happened did I realize that people were recognizing my song before my face. That's when I really realized, 'Fuck, this is different.' "

Gou's North American agent, Stephanie LaFera of WME (which represents her worldwide), says the song's success has created "significant growth in her U.S. audience" that's "only increasing the demand for her." LaFera is focused on opportunities that serve Gou's "super-engaged fan base that cuts across a lot of different spheres" while also introducing her to new listeners.

"For ["It Goes Like"] to become this global song of the summer and be Peggy's first song to hit No. 1 on the U.S. dance radio charts was just such a fantastic tone-setter for this album," Lyons adds, "and for what we believe she's capable of achieving in the U.S."

IF YOU'RE PEGGY GOU, it's entirely possible that the person seated across from you at Thanksgiving dinner may turn out to be Lenny Kravitz — which was exactly the case when, in 2022, she went to a friend's house in Miami for the holiday.

"He had absolutely no idea who I was," Gou recalls. "The only thing I could mention was that I did [two songs] for [his daughter] Zoë's movie [*The Batman*]." It was a solid in. The pair talked over turkey, and her friend told Kravitz to check out Gou's music. Not long after, Kravitz asked if she wanted to collaborate.

She sent Kravitz a track — a song that she had struggled to find a singer for after artists including The Weeknd and Giveon turned it down — and heard nothing back. "So I decided to go to the Bahamas," where Kravitz lives, she says. "My friend was like, 'You want to have Lenny Kravitz on your album? Fucking book your flight, go there and get it.' " There was, Gou says, some "opinion clash" during the recording process, as "I'm a perfectionist and he's perfectionist." She adds with a smile, however, that Kravitz did ultimately tell her she was right about a part of the song they had disagreed on. Their slinky "I Believe in Love Again," the second *I Hear You* single, arrived in November.

Gou's single-minded professional chess moves manifested her deal with XL in the first place, years after she reached out to the label about an internship back when she was a student in London. XL didn't respond then, but it got in touch after the success of her 2018 single "It Makes You Forget (Itgehane)." "I did make a joke," she says of her first meeting with XL, "like, 'Check your inbox.' "

"People see that I'm riding in a Rolls-Royce now, but I used to take a fucking bus … I worked hard to have a glamorous life." —GOU

Gou acknowledges that working with her can be "very difficult because I push the team always harder... If you have so many opinions and you're a woman, people call you a bitch, but [XL] doesn't see it that way. They think it's a pleasure to work with someone who has a clear vision."

XL also most likely enjoys working with a talent who's changing the face of electronic music simply by being one of the most popular artists making it. "As incredible as it is to see a Korean woman occupy this space in dance music culture," says Lyons, who herself is Asian American, "it's not the reason why I'm excited by her."

While a new level of streaming and chart success would be a nice outcome for *I Hear You*, to Gou, they're "very 1D hopes." She'll consider the album a success if people listen to it and — she puts a hand over her heart — "get a feeling."

The feelings are clearly being felt at Coachella, where people in the crowd — many of them, like Gou, also wearing sunglasses though the sun set long ago — are flailing around, arms in the air and dreamy smiles on their faces. A crew of six dancers pop and lock, vogue and gyrate onstage. Gou will take this show on the road this summer for a run that includes European festivals like Primavera Sound, Glastonbury and Creamfields. In August, she's hosting and headlining her own one-day mini-fest at London's Gunnersbury Park; the show's 8,000 tickets sold out within days of going on sale.

Unlike her early years of touring alone, Gou now travels with her tour manager and a road assistant or two. She "doesn't always fly private," but says the primary appeal of a private jet is a preference for efficiency that she says is part of her heritage: "I'm someone who [doesn't] like wasting my time. I'm very efficient. I think that's from Korean culture. Efficiencies are very important in Korea."

A private jet "saves a lot of time," she continues, "and you can sleep half an hour or even one hour more. Also, you don't need to worry about the baggage weight." Perhaps most crucially, though, flying private lets her move through the world while maintaining maximum control. "Hotel lobbies and the airport," she says, "give me so much anxiety."

These days, Gou's team also includes a security detail, as she has experienced stalkers and people "waiting at the hotel or waiting at the airport for 10 hours." She "can't go to Italy alone" and brings two security guards to Argentina where the crowd is "quite wild." She recalls spending the entirety of a commercial flight to Ibiza facing the window after half the plane recognized her while boarding. "I was like, 'My neck,' " she says with a laugh, feigning pain. "It's nice, but sometimes it gets a lot for me."

"She can see 100 meters ahead in the airport. She notices the colors of things, remembers what people are wearing and is just super, super sensitive," touring manager Filippou says, "especially when there's a lot of people around."

But her skin has gotten thicker as her career has grown. "In the beginning, I remember [people saying], 'You will never be bigger than this person. No one's going to buy your record. No one knows your name.' I heard these things so many times."

The criticisms "used to really affect me," Gou continues. "I used to want to scream, like, 'That's not fucking true.' " But as time went on, she realized she was the reason her feelings were getting so hurt. "I was not happy," she says of her pre-pandemic life. "I was so focused and tunnel-visioned. My relationship with boyfriend wasn't doing well. Friends, workwise — nothing was happy. I learned a lot about myself during the pandemic." Learning to listen first and react later has been huge for her. It's why she's wearing a mirrored headpiece that reflects her ears on her album cover and why she named the project *I Hear You*.

One of the biggest early critiques Gou experienced side-eyed her interest in fashion, which made her fear "that people would never take me seriously." So during her early years in Berlin, she sported the de facto DJ uniform of black (and sometimes, maybe, white) T-shirts — a fit that never felt authentic. Around this time, a mentor told her to turn her perceived weaknesses into strengths, so she ditched the tees for couture.

Dressing in brightly colored, flowing sets and racing gear helped her catch the attention of top fashion houses like Louis Vuitton, with which she has had two partnerships. She was good friends with late DJ-designer Virgil Abloh; after his 2021 death, she posted on Instagram that "I will forever be grateful that in the infancy of my career, Virgil showed support at a time when not many others would." Her own Peggy Goods line creates custom merch for each of her shows; at the "1+1=11" music video screening party, more than one person wears a bomber jacket with the song's title embroidered on the back.

Gou documents the fabulousness of it all on her Instagram, which has 4.1 million followers and which — yes — she runs herself. To her, the account is a natural evolution of her old Tumblr, where she would post photos of her outfits, meals and outings. She uses the same approach now on Instagram — except the outfits are by Ferragamo, the meals are on a beach in Ibiza and the outings are playing for tens of thousands of people screaming her name. Her glamorous aesthetic, and the size of her audience, has yielded deals with brands including Don Julio, Coca-Cola and Maybelline.

Now other DJs ask her how they can expand their own brands into the fashion world. It's speculative, but the most obvious answer seems to be to work as hard as she has. "People see that I'm riding in a Rolls-Royce now, but I used to take a fucking bus," she says. "I did an interview in Korea recently, and the first [comment] was, 'I smell old money.' No. My dad was poor. My mom was average. I'm not from a rich family. I worked hard to have a glamorous life."

Like most anyone who has achieved major success and its attendant visibility, people still give Gou shit. But in a true boss move, she has come to enjoy it.

"Now when I hear criticism, it means I'm doing super well," she says. "So go ahead: Say my name."

FLORAL ART INSTALLATION BY FLORES COSMOS

ACROSS

Aoki photographed April 17 in Las Vegas.

Styling by Ali Mullin
Louis Vuitton shirt and suit, Guiseppe Zanotti shoes.

THE AOKIVERSE

Steve Aoki's globe-trotting, business-multiplying, cake-throwing, age-defying lifestyle has made him one of dance music's most groundbreaking and long-lasting artists. He wouldn't have it any other way

BY MITCHELL KUGA

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JESSICA CHOU

STEVE AOKI is obsessed with numbers. It's why the Grammy Award-nominated producer and mega-DJ has a seven-page rider specifying the exact weight and dimensions of the sheet cakes he hurls into the delirious crowds of fans who flock to his shows holding signs that say, "CAKE ME!" It's why, despite an "I'll sleep when I'm dead" tattoo on the back of his neck, he knows per one epigenetic measure that he has slowed his aging process down to 0.8 out of 1 thanks to a rigorous biohacking regimen that includes tracking how much REM sleep he's getting on his WHOOP watch. And it's why, when asked why he wants to live so long in the first place, he equates life to winning the lottery and quotes the statistical probability of simply being alive on this earth as 1 in 400 trillion.

But there is one number Aoki prefers not to know: the amount he's getting paid per show. He worries that knowledge might subconsciously affect the energy he brings from one massive outdoor stage to another, that it might cloud the sacred union he feels between himself, the lucky lottery winner, and his fans, who tend to embody the rollicking frenzy of a punk show that Aoki has injected into electronic dance music (EDM).

It's a high that he says he has grown addicted to, which explains why he DJ'd 209 shows last year and holds the 2012 Guinness World Record for most traveled musician in one year, and (though they've since been broken) the 2014 records for longest crowd cheer and most glow sticks lit simultaneously. It's fitting, then, that on this Wednesday evening in April, Aoki is Zooming with me from a lounge at the San Francisco International Airport as he prepares for a flight to Australia, where he'll DJ five shows in 48 hours before headlining the Siam Songkran Music Festival in Bangkok. At 46 years old — or 36.8, if you take into account his 0.8 aging rate according to TruDiagnostic, an epigenetic testing company — Aoki has little interest in slowing down.

"I still have the thirst," he says. "I still have the enthusiasm, and with music, there's no greater energy force. There's no greater high than playing your records at your show in front of a crowd that knows your music and everyone's just fucking lit up. Like, there's nothing greater than that."

Whatever you might make of his persona as a fist-pumping, hair-shaking, Takis-munching, EDM-spinning, sheet cake-throwing party bro who seems to have perpetually lost his shirt, it's hard to dispute that over the last two decades, Aoki has firmly established himself as a pioneering figure in the world of dance music. That he has done so globally and exuberantly — despite the reserved Asian American stereotypes he grew up absorbing — is a testament to his unabashed confidence, unrelenting work ethic and entrepreneurial instincts, which extend far beyond music.

For starters, there's the all-electric race boat team he recently purchased to compete in the UIM E1 World Championship against competing owners Tom Brady and Rafael Nadal; the *Hiroquest* graphic novel he published in April with comic book legend Jim Krueger, about a genetically augmented meta-human who journeys into the multiverse 400 years into the future; and his various forays into science and tech, from investing in brain research through his Aoki Foundation to ventures in cryptocurrency, esports, non-fungible tokens and cryogenics. In 2022, Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa selected Aoki as one of eight civilians to join his SpaceX moon trip, with a yet-to-be-determined launch date.

"There's always a new thing every year, and the whole team kind of shrugs their shoulders like, 'OK, let's go learn how to do this,' " says Matt Colon, Aoki's business manager of 20 years and the global president of music at talent management agency YMU.

"He embodies that spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship that is so inspiring," says Paris Hilton, a friend of Aoki's since she was 16 who released her first-ever collaboration with him late last year. "Every venture he takes on, he does it with a sense of style and purpose. He has turned his artistic vision into an empire,

"I'm always like, 'Where are the loud ones?' I wanted to see someone Asian that's just loud and in charge and commanding audiences." —AOKI

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY IMOGENE MARRONE

Balenciaga hoodie, robe, jeans and shoes; with his 3D-printed "Sitting Aoki."

Versace top, shirt,
jeans and shoes.

and that's something that I deeply respect and connect with in my own business endeavors."

Colon sees it as his job to foster his client's excitement — even if he admits that roughly half of Aoki's business ideas "get dismissed kind of out of hand because once you get into the details, they don't really make sense." Still, Colon notes that it was that out-of-the-box thinking that allowed Aoki to break into the industry in the first place, by way of Dim Mak Records, the Los Angeles-based label he founded in 1996.

In the early '00s, Dim Mak became a tastemaker by signing acts like The Kills, Bloc Party and Gossip. But perhaps more significantly, Aoki became godfather of the scene that coalesced around Dim Mak Tuesdays, the indie sleaze Hollywood party he threw from 2003 to 2014 to promote the label. With then-rising acts like M.I.A., Lady Gaga, Kesha and Justice clamoring to perform and buzzy guests like the Olsen twins all enshrined by the famed nightlife blog The Cobrasnake, the party took on a life of its own.

Aoki only started DJ'ing to fill the time before performances at Dim Mak Tuesdays, and in the beginning, "he admittedly was not a great DJ," Colon says. But Aoki attributes his success today to his willingness then to keep trying, to fail in public, sweat bullets and then ask for help. "I don't have any kids, but if and when I do, that's one of the most important things I want to share: You need to have that shamelessness," he says. "It's such an important rule of thumb."

"He's an early adopter," Colon adds. "It's in his blood, and it's often because he doesn't have the shame of being afraid to ask. Most people just wait until it's offered to them. Steve will always ask."

Despite his far-reaching business interests, Colon says DJ'ing remains Aoki's primary revenue stream, both internationally and in Las Vegas, where he lives and maintains residencies at three venues. As a producer, he has proved agile at working deftly across genres, collaborating with everyone from Linkin Park and Hayley Kiyoko to Lil Jon and Diplo.

"When you're on the road that much, you come across new people, new trends and new sounds," Lil Jon says. "He's just really easy to work with. He's not overly pushy in the studio — he lets me do my thing but still has input. Neither of us half-ass anything."

Aoki's reach also spans continents, having worked with South Korea's BTS, Mexico's Danna Paola, Japan's Kyary Pamyu Pamyu and Colombia's Maluma. This hodgepodge has bolstered Aoki's international appeal; he says his global fan base is particularly receptive in Central and South America.

He plans to release his ninth album this summer, featuring collaborations with Big Freedia, a rework of Lil Jon's "Get Low" (called "Get Lower") and a lead single with Ne-Yo called "Heavenly Hell" — a phrase he's quick to point out inspired the title of a chapter he's working on in the sequel to *Hiroquest*, which also happens to be the name of his last two albums that also spawned a line of trading cards meant to bolster his graphic novel's intellectual property (IP) across platforms.

This is the way Aoki's mind works — seemingly at its best when it has at least seven tabs open, all the better to connect the various dots that compose the Aokiverse. It's an impulse he attributes to his father, Rocky Aoki, the wrestler turned powerboat racer turned founder of Japanese restaurant chain Benihana, who died in 2008 but remains Aoki's North Star, a larger-than-life figure who seemingly did it all.

"He would just fly in like Superman, coming in to pick me up and take me on an adventure, and then drop me off [at] the humble abode of my mom's house," says Aoki, who was raised by his mother, Chizuru, whom he calls "my rock," in Newport Beach, Calif. "So when I was with him, I just experienced all these things that he was doing. Like 'Oh, my God. This life is crazy over there.' "

I was in college while you were coming up in the early aughts, and it felt kind of shocking to see someone who was Japanese American, like I am, take up so much space so aggressively in alternative culture. Were you thinking about ideas of representation back then?
I'm not going to go down memory lane too deep, but I remember when I first got into music in high school, the first thing I did was sing. You just didn't see Asian singers. You just didn't see Asian people in music, period, and if you did, they were really quiet, like the singer of Hoobastank, whom I looked up to. Actually, I am reworking [the Hoobastank song] "The Reason." I guess we can announce it here: There's a Steve Aoki-Hoobastank record coming soon. But it was cool to actually work with that guy [singer Doug Robb] because I remember looking up to him when I was in high school.

The other main artist I looked up to big time was Chad Hugo from The Neptunes. This is when I first got into production, around 2003. I was in L.A., and I remember hiring someone on Craigslist to teach me how to use Pro Tools because I just started dabbling on the computer. And I was like, "Chad Hugo, that's my hero because he's Asian, but he's also quiet." I'm always like, "Where are the loud ones?" I wanted to see someone Asian that's just loud and in charge and commanding audiences.

Did you become that character because you wanted to see it, or did that exuberance onstage come naturally to you?
One of the really important things that music gave me was a voice because I really, truly felt invisible. Growing up in Newport Beach, the statistic was 96% of the population is white — this is in the '80s and '90s. So I'm already kind of out there, I'm already different, and Asians, generally speaking, don't rock the boat. Japanese people are quiet. My mom's quiet.

Your dad wasn't quiet.
No, he wasn't, but I was raised by my mom. I mean, I'm sure I was inspired by my dad going, "Holy shit, my dad's doing his thing and is successful, and it's not bothering him that he's Japanese, he's just connecting with the world." That is what I loved — the idea that it shouldn't bother you.

But when I was a kid, I was bothered, and that's where music gave me the voice. You could just belt your shit out. A lot of it was just understanding who I was, finding my identity through the music and allowing me to be unabashed about it. I grew up in the punk hardcore scene, and they thrive off that. It's thriving off these underrepresented voices. That's how the culture grows. So I was in the right place to foster this kind of attitude to be heard.

As someone who's known for being a prolific collaborator, how do you connect with other artists? Do you still reach out to people?
It goes both ways for sure. In some cases, if we meet in person, the energy of that meetup ends up becoming something. When I met up with BTS in 2016 at a house in L.A., we just hit it off really well, and in 2017, I ended up remixing "MIC Drop," which later led to [the BTS collaborations] "Waste It on Me" and "The Truth Untold." But sometimes I just do cold DMs. I've always been very unabashed about that. Whoever I want to work with I just send a DM, and if it hits, it hits.

What's your success rate?
I would say my success rate is pretty low. You know, of all the collabs I've done that are out, I've reached out to far greater [than have reached out to me], like 80%.

How does that make you feel?
It's like a game of baseball. That's how I see it. I don't have a problem as long as I hit the ball and I get the home runs, you know? Like the best baseball player in the world hits the ball three out of 10 times. So if you hit the ball two out of 10 times, you're actually above average. If you hit the ball once, you've made the cut. If I can make a record that's meaningful to culture, meaningful to my fans, meaningful to what I'm doing, what my purpose is, then it's worth it and I'm excited. I never lose my excitement on this stuff. I think that question would provoke a different answer if I was tired. If I was jaded. If I wasn't really into what I do. When you love what you do, you still fight for it. You still have the hunger.

What do you like about collaborating with such a wide range of artists? I think some producers would find that really challenging.

> **"When I see 'Steve Aoki' on things or I see the logo, I look at it as a company. And I'm just part of that company ... I finally started separating myself from that because I'm the same kind of fan."** —AOKI

It is. It's extremely challenging. It's challenging on many different levels, too. It's not just challenging on the creative side, but it's challenging to your fans. Like whenever I started collaborating in a different space, I would get a lot of hate; I get a lot of criticism.

What's an example?
When I started working with hip-hop artists in the early 2010s, there was a lot of negative criticism, even when I did *Kolony*, which was an entirely hip-hop album that I produced in 2017. You know, I'm a sensitive guy. I don't like seeing negative shit just pile up.

Do record sales matter to you?
Honestly, no. In the beginning, it does matter, when you have your first hit, when you have something that's just catching steam. But then, going back to your question about collaborating across different genres, I can't think too much about what the world thinks. Of course, it's incredible if I have a song that breaks 100 million streams on Spotify. That's pretty fucking cool. But I can't put my emotional place there. That would probably make me jaded. That would probably hinder my creative spirit, 100%. It's more about, "How does it penetrate the culture? Do the fans at the festivals and the shows sing along? Are they connected to it?"

It sounds like the measurement for your success is more experiential than data-driven. How else do you gauge that?
Yeah, it is something that grows over time. You could sort of gauge it on some level of metrics, but then there's a lot of other layers. You can't just type in "What's Steve Aoki's biggest song on the festival circuit?" If you type that in, you might not get the correct answers. [Artificial intelligence] cannot generate that. For example, "No Beef" is an old song of mine that I made with Afrojack in 2011. That was before streaming was actually a big deal, but everyone knows the vocals to that at my shows.

As an artist, what are your thoughts on AI?
I'm still a novice in the usage or utility of AI, but I use it mainly for lyric generation. It has actually helped me quite a lot. If I have an idea of what lyrics I want to put down on a record, I'll work that out with AI, and if I have a songwriting team in my house and we get stumped, we can always use AI. As far as sampling, I've used AI to get a particular female sound using certain words, and that has been fantastic.

What about the fear of it replacing producers and DJs entirely?
See, of course that's the conversation topic because the possibilities are endless. But when that happens, I'm assuming, just like everything that we do with technology, we're building safeguards. And you can't stop AI. It's not like, "Oh, fuck. AI is going to take away our jobs. Fuck technology, it's going to take away jobs." You can't. You just have to ride the wave with it and just start building safeguards as we go. We've been doing this the whole time with the internet.

Let's pivot to another serious topic: How does it feel to throw a sheet cake into someone's face?
OK, there's a lot of points here. One, I think it really goes along with this idea that people are singing your songs at your show and your music is their music. So we're all part of the same culture. You're partially responsible because you created that music and that experience. That's what the cake is. I've been able to share an experience that was such a silly idea, and now it's a thing. As a culture, people want to get caked, and it's a very Steve Aoki thing.

How many years have you been doing it now?
Thirteen.

Wow. That's a lot of cake.
Yeah, over 20,000 cake faces. It's pretty epic.

How consciously are you aware of yourself, Steve Aoki, as a brand?
It's interesting because when I see "Steve Aoki" on things or I see the logo, I look at it as a company. And I'm just part of that company.

You're just another worker?
(*Laughs.*) I mean, really. It's like, "Oh, my God. There's a person with a Steve logo or a tattoo on his arm." It does excite me. I'm like, "Wow, that's so incredible." But that's the music, you know? It's not me personally. So I finally started separating myself from that because I'm the same kind of fan. I have a band [tattooed] on my back that inspired me when I was in high school called Gorilla Biscuits. It's not someone's name, but Steve Aoki is like a band to someone. So I understand the way music moves people and why you do that. It's a community. That's how I see the brand.

I think a lot of this is not just about the music, too; it's the experience, you know? And the experience itself is something that can last a lifetime. That's why the live show is so important. It's not just about being a producer in the studio and getting the music out there and having people connect with the music in their homes. A lot of my IP is based on the actual experience [of a live show], and unfortunately, I can't clone myself because as an entrepreneur, you would think, "How do you scale that?"

Is that why you play so many shows?
Yeah. It's like you get this momentum going when things are happening, and I've seen a lot of friends, a lot of artists, taking their brick and just disappearing. And they didn't have the same momentum to come back as strong as they were.

Are you scared of that happening to you?
I am. I think I am. I mean, I don't want to say that, but I think it does have this effect on me because the thing is, I love what I do. Like, to be able to be onstage and the high that you get after a show, it's just incredible.

What's the secret to keeping this so fun after doing it for so long?
I'm glad you asked this question. I just was in South Africa and I did two shows out there, and during my extra time, I worked on music with two South African artists. I actually connected with more African artists from different regions as well and their beats, like Afrobeats and *amapiano*, have definitely been coming up inside my beats. The sounds, the rhythms, the percussions, I have a strong affinity to this music. That was so much fun. That's what keeps things going.

I think being a global artist, being able to travel all the time, my natural way to connect with different cultures is to musically connect and collaborate with different people of that culture. And fortunately, they've allowed me to work with them in different capacities that have brought out some of these incredible global records that connect my sound to their sound. And the more and more I do it, the more exciting it is and the more it's connecting with a whole different world of people, with a different culture. You see it at the shows. It just becomes more exciting to do more outside of what you normally do. It's a challenge, too, and I love the challenge.

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Ten years ago, **Sean Miyashiro** was developing an idea that **Ollie Zhang** worried was a "faraway concept": a music industry hub for Asian artists. There's still nothing quite like their singular company, **88rising**

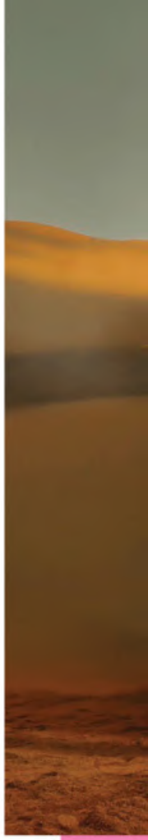
LIVING TH

88rising head of artist development Zhang (center) and the members of Atarashii Gakko! photographed April 16 at 88rising in Los Angeles. Left: Miyashiro photographed April 17 in L.A.

E DREAM

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY YURI HASEGAWA



AS A STUDENT at the University of California, San Diego, Ollie Zhang oversaw the campus' annual music festival and dozens of concerts throughout the year. Post-graduation, he co-founded the dance music brand Space Yacht in 2015. But he aspired to have a bigger, different kind of impact on the music business. "This idea of finding a place within the music industry for Asian artists to thrive always felt like a faraway concept to me," he says. "A lot of the folks that I worked with and came up with in the music industry were Asian Americans. We all had this far-off dream that this is something that could be possible one day."

So when Zhang (now 33) met Sean Miyashiro (now 42) in 2015, he says it was "serendipity" because Miyashiro was developing the very idea Zhang had imagined: carving out space for Asian and Asian American artistry to flourish. At the time, Miyashiro was helping *VICE* launch its dance music site, THUMP, but he soon realized, "If we created something to celebrate [our creative community], it would be better than anything else that exists."

Together, he and Zhang grew their shared vision into the company that became 88rising, the first and only hub for Asian artists in the music industry. 88rising launched with a small roster of clients Miyashiro was independently managing at the time, including choreographer-singer Brian Puspos, rappers Keith Ape and Dumbfoundead and dance artist josh pan. Zhang was at first, he believes, creative manager, then became chief of staff and is now head of artist development. (He also manages two of 88rising's key signings, singer-songwriter NIKI and elusive indie-alternative star Joji.) And while the company initially focused on hip-hop, Miyashiro immediately made clear that it was never intended to be for any one type of creative — or even be any one thing at all.

Today, 88rising is a label, management firm and global brand — with Miyashiro, who alongside Zhang spoke to *Billboard* during weekend one of Coachella at a private residence in Indio, Calif., teasing that yet another new division is on the way. The company's wide-ranging label roster includes NIKI, Joji and rappers Rich Brian and Jackson Wang. Meanwhile, the 88rising brand has grown into a behemoth. In 2018, it held its inaugural Head in the Clouds festival at Los Angeles State Historic Park, and the event has since expanded to New York; Jakarta, Indonesia; Manila, the Philippines; and Guangzhou, China. In 2020, 88rising launched North America's first 24/7 radio channel dedicated to Asian artists, on SiriusXM; in 2021, the company curated the soundtrack to the Marvel blockbuster *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*; in 2022, it became the first label to score its own billing on Coachella's lineup (returning in 2024); and, last year, it struck a global distribution deal with Sony's The Orchard.

"Sean creating 88rising from just an idea in his head to what it has become today is incredible," Wang says. "The thing I immediately knew about Sean is his vibe was so real from day one. He cares about art deeply before anything else, which is so rare in this music game or entertainment industry. I knew I could trust him, and he immediately began guiding me into decisions not only about my music, but how I see myself as an artist and human being."

But regardless of exactly *what* 88rising does, Zhang attests that the *why* has never, and will never, change. "The mission statement remains the same to this day: uplifting Asian youth culture around the world," he says. "Everything that we've done is a manifestation of that same intent. Obviously, the stakes have gotten higher, but where we're at now is not even what we could have necessarily dreamed of."

88rising artists NIKI (right) and Wang, who says of Miyashiro: "The thing I immediately knew about Sean is his vibe was so real from day one."

Tell us about operating as a label and as a brand.

SEAN MIYASHIRO It never was intended to be a label. I didn't know anything about what it was to distribute a record or whatever. And I probably still don't, frankly speaking. Like, I still don't know how royalties break down and all this stuff. The intention of 88rising was to be a celebratory platform, and just by nature of what we were putting out, which was really based on the distinct taste of the people that were working here, that became the brand. That became the beating heartbeat of what 88rising was. And then all these artists started hitting us up, just being like, "We like this energy. Let's do something." Being a label was a happy accident… And we have a great opportunity to continually do more, so we have to take responsibility in that opportunity because nobody has really come after us.

How does operating as a global brand entice artists, beyond only offering label services?

OLLIE ZHANG There's that little percentage of value that comes with [being] a brand, and I think that's the intention. We do our best to make it incredibly clear that being here for an artist is advantageous and that you will be supported. Seeing [Japanese girl group] Atarashii Gakko!, for instance, use every single Head in the Clouds festival over the last couple of years, moving them slowly up and up the lineup and introducing them to different markets around the world — that is something that people definitely notice. And especially for an act like [them], the experience of being at that show instantly converts you into a fan. So how do we create as many opportunities for people to experience that as possible? That's the advantage of being the platform that we are.

MIYASHIRO When we're in Asia, it's crazy. I went to Indonesia with my family, and I was in one of those things that scale a mountain, and the operator is like, "You're Sean." When we go to Japan, when we go to China, it's the same type of feeling — people know what we're trying to do. And it's by way of trying to be as consistent as possible. We have to push ourselves to stay ahead of this. I have anxiety; I never ever feel that we're sitting pretty. It's the complete opposite.

Many of 88rising's wins are industrywide firsts, like the label's now-annual Coachella billing. Why is the company able to pull off such feats?

ZHANG I think that's a big credit to Sean and daring to believe that that's possible. And obviously, a credit to the team that's here and has been here over the last eight years to help execute that. And we couldn't have done that as well without earning the trust and belief of artists that we look after, artists within the community, artists across the world. And it has all been iterative, right? It's

WANG: CONNOR GASKEY. NIKI, COACHELLA: LINDSEY BLANE. BRIAN: DEANIE CHEN.

Artists who performed at the 88rising Futures showcase at Coachella on April 15. Standing, from left: BIBI, Atarashii Gakko!'s SUZUKA and MIZYU, JP the Wavy, U-Lee, Wang and Number_i's Yuta Jinguji, Yuta Kishi and Sho Hirano. Seated: XIN LIU, Tiger JK, Yoonmirae, Atarashii Gakko!'s KANON, Awich, NENE, MaRI and LANA. Kneeling: Atarashii Gakko!'s RIN. Right: Rich Brian.

not necessarily a straight path, but it has always been moving in that direction.

MIYASHIRO I love being able to [work with Japanese group] Number_i and new things because K-pop is already fully [established globally], times a thousand, and that's amazing. [It's] incredible what the whole industry there has built. But I want to showcase somebody from Cambodia or Vietnam. We love being first; it's fun. Who wants to be second?

The 88rising Coachella set always features a variety of talent across countries and genres, including Japanese acts like Number_i this year. Considering that the label launched as a predominately hip-hop platform, what is now drawing a wider range of artists to the company?

MIYASHIRO Fundamentally, we're not business-driven or very good at business. Business is something that we have to learn by nature of, like, being able to make payroll. We're inherently artist- and creative-driven. That's what fuels everything. But the thing is, we're so lucky to have built a relationship and a friendship and a bond with [our roster]. That's what it really is. And that's why nobody leaves, to be honest. We say this all the time: It needs to be so painfully obvious to the artist that [being on 88rising] is a benefit to them.

ZHANG It's [about] aiding the artists on their own journey to find out what they want to communicate to the world or what kind of artists or musicians they want to be. NIKI is a great example of that. In the pandemic, she really started feeling like the kind of artist she wanted to be was going back to the singer-songwriter lane where she was making music in her bedroom in Jakarta. That's why when she brought that original idea for [her second studio album] *Nicole*, it was a no-brainer in terms of wanting to embrace that and bring her creative partners that make sense.

What up-and-comers are you putting muscle behind this year?

ZHANG A big part of the 88rising set [at Coachella] was an eye toward great Japanese talent with Number_i, Atarashii Gakko! and Yoasobi. I don't know if it was intentional, but that's what we've rallied around in this specific moment.

MIYASHIRO A lot of people have been like, "Oh, dude, there's a lot of Japanese artists," but it wasn't a planned thing. It's always by nature of who we might be talking to about something as small as making a song. And then it's like, "Yo, come on over." These are invaluable opportunities for artists. Just in culture, [the fact that] Number_i played Coachella is like, "What, where did that come from?" Because it's like, how else would they get here? We love being able to deliver these things with ease … It's like, "Yo, Paul [Tollett, president of Coachella promoter Goldenvoice], give us some real estate here. We'll figure it out." Literally, I was like, "Just make sure that we're on the flyer." I had no idea what we were going to do, but it's organic. It's like putting together a block party.

How do you see 88rising's Coachella billing evolving?

MIYASHIRO We're going to do it again next year. We're going to start earlier, and I have an idea … We've been doing a celebration, [offering] a glimpse of all these artists going back-to-back-to-back. I think that, in the future, we want to do something a bit more orchestrated and seamless with a theme. Kind of like a musical. Tell a light story in 75 minutes. We're actually starting that process.

What else are you working on?

MIYASHIRO Right now, there are so many aspiring artists, young people, deciding to make music. And with all the infrastructure that we built and the know-how, we have the opportunity to help a lot of them. We are going to create something called FAM, Future of Asian Music. It's a distribution ecosystem for independent Asian artists.

There's a lot of distribution mechanisms that somebody can use, but we're going to be [creating] a really nice ecosystem of curation and recommendation through artists of influence. [There will be] a lot of live stuff within this, and it's all around the ethos of DIY, independent, next-generation Asian music from all over Asia. We're doing a ton of content around this from live programming, like our version of COLORS [the German music platform known for simple live recordings from up-and-comers around the world]. It's like [a] from-your-bedroom-to-stardom-type of thing. We want to be a part of that conversation and journey every step of the way. This is a fire starter … and pretty soon, there's hopefully a thousand artists distributed through us. I think that we will reach that.

ZHANG It's fully realizing the original intent of 88rising. And more important for an artist nowadays is not the sheer process of getting your music on a platform, it's how do you create content to put you in context with all the other artists that are uploading music every day? FAM is a vehicle to express that.

What subgenres do you think are shaping the future of Asian music?

ZHANG I think that Isoknock — [comprising dance/electronic artists] ISOxo and Knock2 — are leading the charge on a major resurgence in electronic dance music here and around the world. They are just pure rock stars. And I think that they are actively revitalizing a scene that has been dormant. Both Sean and I come from the dance world, grew up in electronic music — so has a lot of our staff — so that's something where once we saw how special it was, just from the ground floor, we wanted to jump on it. For them to be two Asian American kids from San Diego and for dance music being a big part of Asian American culture over the last couple of decades, that really means something that they're at the forefront.

How do you view the impact of 88rising so far?

MIYASHIRO It's funny because when we started, some haters were like, "Oh, dude, you think you're the only person that can do this?" I hear people in investment meetings saying, "We're going to be the next 88rising for African music," and that's dope. I love hearing that. But in the Asian space, it hasn't happened yet. I'm sure it will in some way, shape or form. And we love that. That was the point. If we cease to exist tomorrow, we can look back and have some peace and be like, "We really did something here."

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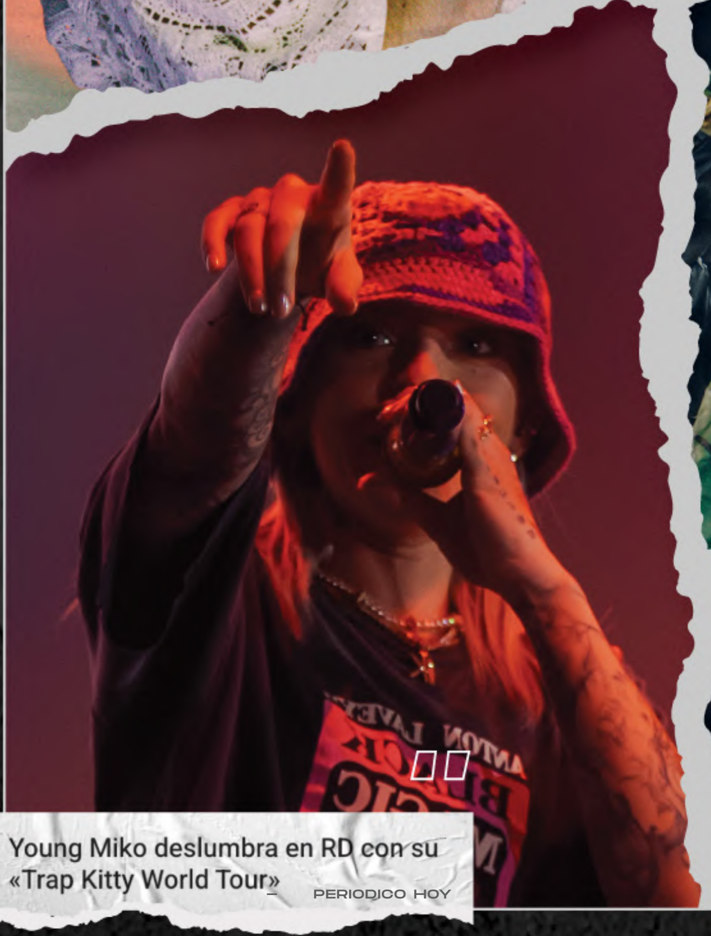

Young Miko deslumbra en RD con su «Trap Kitty World Tour»

— PERIODICO HOY

Karol G, todo un huracán de energía en dos noches en Estadio Olímpico

— PERIODICO EL DÍA

ELADIO CARRIÓN ROMPE EN RD CON TRES CONCIERTOS EN EL PALACIO DE LOS DEPORTES

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Dominican star El Alfa onstage at the 2023 Premios Heat in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 'EVEN THE TREES SING AND DANCE'

Premios Heat, the Latin American-produced live music awards show seen regionwide, celebrates its 10th anniversary in the market with expanded exposure BY LEILA COBO

WHEN SINGER Manuel Turizo released his single "La Bachata" in May 2022, it was a risky move. The Colombian singer was venturing into Dominican territory not only by singing bachata — a very regional Dominican music genre — but by cheekily titling his foray "La Bachata" (The Bachata).

The risk paid off. By August, Turizo's pop- and tropical-laced take on bachata landed at No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Tropical Airplay chart, where it ruled for 14 weeks, and it rose to No. 1 on the Latin Airplay chart in October. The track also reached No. 6 on the Billboard Global 200 (becoming the first bachata song to enter the top 10 since the chart's inception in 2020) and No. 3 on the Global Excl. U.S. chart. It peaked at No. 67 on the all-genre Billboard Hot 100 in October.

"Music is universal," Turizo told *Billboard* following the song's success. "These are the influences Dominican music left in me."

Turizo is far from the only Latin star influenced by Dominican music. In the past few years, a number of non-Dominican superstars — including Rosalía (with The Weeknd on "La Fama"), Shakira (with Ozuna on "Monotonía"), Karol G ("El Barco") and, most recently, Chayanne (with 2023 hit "Bailando Bachata") — has topped the charts by capitalizing on the broad appeal of bachata, known for its signature percussion and plucked guitars.

Bachata's popularity, along with a rising interest in *dembow* and the strength of other traditional Dominican genres like merengue, have refocused attention on the music coming from the small Caribbean country that shares its island territory with Haiti but has distinct idiosyncrasies and a booming economy fueled by tourism. Despite its size, the Dominican Republic is second only to Mexico in Latin America in the number of tourists who visit every year, according to statistics site Statista.

When it comes to music, the DR — as it is affectionately known — is teeming with it. As beloved global star Juan Luis Guerra once famously said, "Even the avocados sing." The DR's vast roster of international stars includes the more global Guerra, as well as Romeo Santos, Aventura and Prince Royce (who, although all born in the Bronx, identify with

PREMIOS HEAT

> "The music industry in the Dominican Republic is clearly growing. Although the big companies and streamers have long been in the territory, we see more artists working hand in hand with them, and the growth impact is palpable."
>
> —DIANA MONTES, PREMIOS HEAT

their Dominican music and roots). In Latin America, the list includes merengue stars Milly Quezada, Los Hermanos Rosario and Sergio Vargas, who are all active today.

While music from the DR has been less ubiquitous than music from Puerto Rico, for example, in the past five years, the country has significantly upped its musical exports, thanks in part to a new generation of stars including Natti Natasha, El Alfa, Tokischa, J Noa and Amenazzy. Major labels have taken notice, with Natasha, Tokischa and J Noa all now signed to or distributed through Sony Latin. This is in no small part due to the explosion of Dominican dembow — an exciting, vibrant fusion that's filling arenas thanks to artists like El Alfa, who, in turn, has helped globalize the style by working with genre-bending acts such as Camilo, Fuerza Régida, Rauw Alejandro and Peso Pluma. Tokischa has recorded with Rosalía and traded an onstage kiss with Madonna during the legend's Celebration tour stop in New York, while Natasha has emerged as the country's most prominent pop star.

The DR is poised to assume an even bigger role on the global music stage. This year, in addition to its local Premios Soberano, Premios Heat — which has traditionally taken place on the beaches of DR — celebrates its 10th anniversary on July 11 as a Latin American-produced live music awards show that's viewed regionwide. For the first time, in addition to broadcasting on HTV, the awards will also stream on YouTube.

Industrywise, the newly minted Dominican Music Week returned April 16-18 for a second year of panels and new-artist showcases. "The music industry in the Dominican Republic is clearly growing," Premios Heat president Diana Montes says. "Although the big companies and streamers have long been in the territory, we see more artists working hand in hand with them, and the growth impact is palpable."

Billboard spoke with industry leaders about the present and the future of a country that lives and breathes music.

A Fusion Of Rhythms

Although the Dominican Republic has always been rich with a wealth of Latin genres — bachata, merengue, *merengue típico* — Montes is particularly excited about the surge of dembow, "which has taken over the global charts," and the new mix of rhythms that has come with it. "There's an amazing fusion of genres going on," she says, citing Peso Pluma's collaboration with dembow pioneer El Alfa and Chimbala's many collaborations with reggaetón acts. New talent is proliferating, and, she says, "Tropical music is coming back. That fills me with enthusiasm."

On the radar Montes mentions J Noa, a rapper recently signed by Sony Music, as an "incredible" talent, as well as proponents of new tropical music like Chimbala.

Clockwise from top left: Tokischa, Santos and Guerra.

Dominicans Take On The World

Never, perhaps, have Dominican music and its artists enjoyed as much global recognition as they do today. "The increasing value placed on Dominican music and its music-makers in the global market is exciting to watch," attorney Rosa Mayra Tejada says. That recognition, she adds, goes hand in hand with the growth of the market itself and the increased participation of Dominican artists on international hits, as well as composers and producers. "I'm excited about a musical market that's growing and where all our creators have more and better opportunities to prepare for this changing market," Tejada says.

TOKISCHA: MEDIOS Y MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES. SANTOS: PARAS GRIFFIN/GETTY IMAGES. GUERRA: RICARDO RUBIO/EUROPA PRESS/GETTY IMAGES.

A place to learn "Dominican Music Week is the best place to acquire or refresh knowledge and interact with music executives," Tejada says.

Music That's A Cultural Heritage Of Humanity

The DR birthed two genres of great significance: "merengue and bachata, which have also been declared by the UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity," a designation of cultural heritage including traditions or living expressions inherited from ancestors such as the performing arts, says Valerio de León Severino, president of the country's general society of authors, composers and editors, Sgacedom. "2024 is shaping up to be a year of growth for Dominican music genres, given the fact that important international artists have placed their eyes on the music and market," Severino continues. "Likewise, Dominican talent is more aware than ever of the importance of digital platforms to internationalize their music."

On the radar "Established acts Juan Luis Guerra, Eddy Herrera, Milly Quezada, Sergio Vargas, El Prodigio, Elvis Martinez, Sacarías Ferreiras and El Chaval," Severino says.

Educating For Growth

As CEO of indie music company and distributor Aparataje, Jairo Bautista has focused on educating his artists and creators since 2015. "Topics like royalty splits, publishing rights and neighboring rights are common topics of discussion in recording sessions," he says. "This has also led to a surge in a new generation of Dominican executives with deep knowledge of the business." The versatility of Dominican artists and musicians has allowed them to adapt and interact with other genres, "thanks to the rich mix of cultures and genres, including orchestral merengue, typical merengue and, particularly, urban music." The lattermost is where Bautista sees the most growth, with urban artists selling out shows throughout the country and with labels willing to invest "up to $10 million" in signing advances.

On the radar "Without a doubt, dembow is the main mass-consumption genre right now," Bautista says. "TikTok has become the main platform to viralize the music. And merengue típico is living a resurgence thanks to new artists who are bringing a fresh take to this legendary Dominican genre." Artists to watch include Chimbala, Bulova and Don Miguelo.

Local Expertise That Translates To Global Recognition

International superstars may have globalized bachata and merengue, but their foundation lies in the expertise and musicianship of local

Anuel AA at Premios Heat in 2023.

PREMIOS HEAT TURNS 10

SUPERSTARS LIKE KAROL G AND FEID HAVE BEEN HONORED THROUGHOUT THEIR CAREERS BY THE AWARDS

Montes

Diana Montes was working in sales and sponsorships at the Latin Recording Academy in 2013 when Turner Media Group contacted her with an ambitious proposal: Could she create a Latin music awards show outside the United States to air on HTV, the Latin music channel then owned by TBS? It was a challenging idea because at the time, all major Latin music awards shows were produced stateside.

"We decided to make a Latin music award for Latins, made in Latin America," Montes says. She pitched the concept to multiple cities and countries and finally partnered with the Dominican Republic's burgeoning tourist destination of Cap Cana.

Today, 10 years after its first broadcast by the seashore, the event has grown from a homey show to a major ceremony with a massive online following and a cadre of devoted artists — including Karol G and Feid — who have been feted by Premios Heat throughout their careers.

Montes plans to honor many of them during the anniversary edition of the awards show on July 11, set once again for the beaches of Cap Cana.

How has Premios Heat evolved?
We have only existed for 10 years but have grown in a huge way. When we started, HTV was only seen in Latin America, and there was no great impact in Mexico or the U.S. Now we've expanded. Since 2020, 2021, our biggest audiences are in the United States, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, in that order.

What makes this awards show different?
The staging. We're a beach awards show where the beach is a protagonist. Our slogan is "The only awards show with the Caribbean Sea as the stage." We're unique because it's very complicated to stage an awards show on a beach. And yet, in 10 years, we've never had a weather disaster. And obviously, having an awards show on the beach is very different than in an arena. Artists come with a different vibe, and all our concepts are tropical chic.

Did you initially have skeptics?
When I first started, people used to say this wasn't an awards show but a beach festival that happened to hand out awards. Now they say I created a unique format and we've connected with a younger audience.

How are the finalists and winners decided?
Nominations are based on video rotation on HTV, and we also have a committee of radio programmers throughout Latin America who tell us what's playing in different countries. Once nominations are out, they're public, and people vote for the winners. Anyone can vote. We also give out two editorial awards: social commitment, to an artist who has effected change through their foundation, and a golden award, which is the big award of the night that we give for career trajectory.

What's different this year?
It's a very special year because it's our 10-year anniversary. We've expanded our categories, and this year, we'll name winners in 29 categories, including a video-game streaming song. We're also going to give out song of the year for the first time, and we're launching a salsa category. We're also excited about our app, Heat.TV. We launched it in 2021, and we have 647,000 unique monthly users. Last year, we had 5.2 million people watch the show in its entirety on the app. —L.C.

ANUEL AA: PREMIOS HEAT. MONTES: ANDREA RAMIREZ PR.

composers and musicians. The DR "has been able to position genres like bachata, merengue and dembow on an international stage, and this means that locally you can find an industry of musicians, producers, composers and arrangers who are experts in those genres," says Emiliano Vásquez, an A&R manager at Sony Music Latin. "It thrills me to say that tropical genres have increasing presence in international markets and that it's increasingly common to see Dominican musicians being tapped for their expertise."

Hidden talents Composers like Brasa have credits on tracks with Bad Bunny, Prince Royce and Diego Torres, while writer-producer Cromo X has credits on a merengue song with Kali Uchis that was made in the DR.

An 'Inexhaustible Source Of Talent And Grace'

Amarilys German, longtime manager for Guerra, describes her country as an "inexhaustible source of talent and grace. Here, even the trees sing and dance." But German has also seen a tangible change in live music since the end of the pandemic. "The growth in massive shows has been huge," she says, noting fans' behavior has changed dramatically. "Prior to the pandemic, you went on sale, and truly, until the last week, you had no idea what was going to happen, and there was no presale." Now tickets sell from the first day, "which allows managers, artists and promoters to have clarity and work with added precision."

On the radar J Noa, SNENiE and Damn Goldo.

Rap, Dembow And DIY

Vulcano Music Entertainment CEO Juan Carlos Restituyo has seen a dramatic shift in the urban side of the Dominican music industry, with up-and-coming artists either launching their own imprints or partnering with established labels like his. The move underscores the growing viability of Dominican urban sounds, which Restituyo splits into two front-runners: Dominican rap and dembow, represented by Rochy RD and El Alfa, respectively. Rochy RD's "Ella No Es Tuya" (with Myke Towers and Nicki Nicole) made President Barack Obama's summer 2023 playlist, and El Alfa's most recent collaboration, "La Botella," features Enrique Iglesias. "The Dominican Republic has become a popular destination for both music and tourism," Restituyo says. "Those foreigners are the main distributors of Dominican happiness at a global scale, and they're our major music exporters."

On the radar "We're doing very well with our roster of El Alfa, Bulin 47, Rochy RD, Kiry Curu, Lapiz Conciente, Ceky Viciny, El Mayor Clásico and Paramba," Restituyo says, "and also excited about emerging acts like Rosaly Rubio and El Chuky de Lewa, among others."

A Vibrant Live Music Scene

According to SD Concerts president Saymon Díaz, "Music is the entertainment industry that generates the most income and audience in the country." Post-pandemic, he says, Dominicans have changed their live-music consumption habits. Where before fans waited until the last minute to buy tickets, today, "shows sell out online in 24 hours and websites collapse." Fandom now extends beyond shows themselves, with fans buying merchandise and some restaurants even offering themed menus on show days. Most importantly, Dominicans' musical taste is vast and goes beyond tropical and local genres. "K-pop and fusion are consumed in a big way," he says.

On the radar The new Capitalia festival premiered April 20 with shows by four icons: Guerra, Sting, Juanes and Residente. "We want to make Capitalia an annual trademark that we eventually export," Díaz says. His artists on the rise include J Noa and urban singer-songwriter Chris Lebrón.

"The Dominican Republic has become a popular destination for both music and tourism. Those foreigners are the main distributors of Dominican happiness at a global scale, and they're our major music exporters."

—JUAN CARLOS RESTITUYO, VULCANO MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Top: Greeicy (left) and Mike Bahía at Premios Heat) in 2023. Bottom: Vargas.

GREEICY: PREMIOS HEAT. VARGAS: JOHNNY LOUIS/GETTY IMAGES.

An Explosion Of Dembow

While long associated with merengue and bachata, the DR has produced music of many genres, including pop, ballads, boleros, jazz and, most recently, dembow. Now music festivals worldwide are booking dembow artists like El Alfa, Tokischa and Chimbala and composers such as Brasa, Cromo X and Maffio, who are collaborating with stars like Bad Bunny and Karol G — marking a "major change," says Porfirio Pina, president of indie La Oreja Media Group and founder of Dominican Music Week. "It's exciting to see the development of our music industry at a local level and the presence of [digital service providers] and multinationals in the country."

On the radar J Noa, Solo Fernández, Techy Fatule, Yendry and Letón Pé.

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2024 INTERNATIONAL POWER PLAYERS

The executives who are driving success outside the United States have contributed to a ninth consecutive year of growth for the global recorded-music business

BY THOM DUFFY // ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE LAGARDE

Top artists on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart in the past year include (from left) NewJeans, Jung Kook, Peso Pluma, Karol G, Swift, Bad Bunny and The Weeknd.

WAY BACK IN 2015 — when "Uptown Funk!" was the hottest hit of the year, Sam Smith was named best new artist at the Grammy Awards and Taylor Swift had the year's top album with the original version of *1989* — the global music industry hit a significant milestone.

Its revenue grew — for the first time in 20 years. That was the beginning of a comeback, and the industry has sustained it since.

In March, when IFPI released its annual Global Music Report with worldwide results for the recorded-music business for 2023, it reported revenue had grown for a ninth consecutive year, reaching $28.6 billion worldwide.

Music streaming, of course, has driven that growth, and the IFPI report contained even more good news, stating that paid subscriptions to music streaming services hit a new high of more than 667 million users.

Among those who have contributed to the music business' overall growth are *Billboard*'s 2024 International Power Players — executives nominated by their firms and peers and chosen by our editors from selected industry sectors. All have primary responsibility for markets outside the United States, which account for nearly 60% of the world's recorded-music sales.

In fact, although the United States and Canada had a collective global recorded-music revenue increase of 7.4% in 2023, that was the lowest regional growth rate measured last year by IFPI. That figure was surpassed by Europe at 8.9%, Australasia at 10.4%, the Middle East and North Africa at 14.4%, Asia at 14.9%, Latin America at 19.4% and Sub-Saharan Africa at 24.7% (South Africa accounts for 77% of revenue in that region).

Each of those regions is represented among this year's International Power Players.

In a statement accompanying the global results, IFPI CFO/interim joint head John Nolan said, "This growth results from record companies' sustained investment in artists and their careers — more than $7.1 billion annually on A&R and marketing alone [as measured in 2022] — and the impact it has on music ecosystems all over the world."

Yet the global music business faces no shortage of tests as it aims for a solid decade of growth.

"The sustained growth of the recorded-music market is encouraging," IFPI chief legal officer/interim joint head Lauri Rechardt says, "but it's also right for us to acknowledge the challenges the industry faces, including streaming fraud, digital piracy in all its forms and, of course, the threat from the abuse of generative artificial intelligence [AI] if it is not developed responsibly and with respect for artists' and labels' rights.

"Music fans greatly value authenticity, and our industry has a strong track record of licensing music and supporting the development of new services that create these experiences for fans," Rechardt continues. "That said, we still need effective tools and the support of authorities to tackle unauthorized uses and to ensure the music ecosystem remains one that is sustainable for the long term."

NEWJEANS, KAROL G: CHRISTOPHER POLK FOR BILLBOARD. JUNG KOOK: KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES. PESO PLUMA: ERIKA GOLDRING/WIREIMAGE. SWIFT: ASHOK KUMAR/TAS24/GETTY IMAGES. BAD BUNNY: DAVID BECKER/GETTY IMAGES. THE WEEKND: ANDREAS RENTZ/GETTY IMAGES.

MUSIC GROUPS GLOBAL

Rebecca Berman
Senior vp of international, Concord Label Group

Fred Gillham
Managing director of U.K. and Europe, Concord Label Group

Jeff Van Driel
GM of international operations, Concord

Concord has invested in its global team with key hires and partnerships. "Adding A&R in the U.K., capacity in Latin America and Asia, and launching our European commercial team has allowed us to take further control of campaigns for our labels and artists," says Berman, who notes the global success of Ghost and Thirty Seconds to Mars as proof that the strategy is working. Van Driel adds that Concord's administrative teams in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia have reorganized to accommodate local needs while centralizing shared functions at Concord's Nashville headquarters. "We have introduced numerous tech solutions that integrate regional processes into our global system," he says.

Thomas Coesfeld
CEO, BMG

Sebastian Hentzschel
COO, BMG

Coesfeld, who took over BMG's top role in July, wasted no time making major changes at the fourth-largest global music company, including bringing its streaming distribution in-house and partnering with Universal Music Group to handle distribution of BMG's physical products. "Striking direct distribution agreements with Spotify and Apple unleashes a new level of service," he says. "We now have direct access to data that can really move the dial for artists and songwriters and a unique position in the market." Coesfeld adds that the changes give BMG "a laser focus on our core businesses of publishing and recordings."

Adam Granite
CEO of Africa, Middle East and Asia, Universal Music Group

Dickon Stainer
President/CEO of global classics and jazz and Verve Label Group, Universal Music Group

Michelle Teh
Senior vp of global classics and jazz, Universal Music Group

Granite says that "over the past 12 months, UMG has continued to strengthen and expand our operations, repertoire and leadership teams around the world." UMG invested in Mavin Records in Nigeria, Oriental Star Agencies in South Asia, Chabaka Music in the Middle East/North Africa and RS Group in Thailand. In addition, the company reached new deals with Chinese stars Jay Chou and Eason Chan. Granite says there are "huge opportunities for global music to find popularity through streaming and discovery."

Seventeen's 10th EP, *FML*, has achieved global sales of more than 6 million, according to HYBE.

PLEDIS ENTERTAINMENT

Donny Novakovic
Vp of international marketing, Disney Music Group

"I am proud of the achievements my team and I have had curating the soundtracks of the world, breathing life into the deep catalog and unearthing hidden gems in multiple languages," Novakovic says. Disney continues to build "a bridge between cultures," he adds, noting the impact of titles such as *Frozen*, *Frozen II* and *Moana*. "With their upcoming sequels, we'll continue building on these cherished stories' legacy," Novakovic says. And *Encanto* has sold 8 million copies of its soundtrack, according to Disney, "proving the world is still talking about Bruno."

Jiwon Park
CEO, HYBE

YJ Shin
President, BIGHIT Music

Sung Soo Han
Master professional, PLEDIS Entertainment

Yoo Jin Oh
GM, HYBE 360

HYBE's diversification — including its acquisitions of Quality Control and Exile Music — helped it become the first South Korean entertainment company to surpass 2 billion won ($1.5 billion) in revenue, based on its 2023 results. But many of the company's highlights still came from its bread-and-butter K-pop artists. Jung Kook topped the Billboard Hot 100 with "Seven" (featuring Latto), and Jimin's "Like Crazy" also hit No. 1 on the chart. Seventeen's 10th EP, *FML*, became the best-selling K-pop album in history with global sales of 6.3 million, according to HYBE. Post-pandemic tours by BTS, Tomorrow X Together, Le Sserafim, ENHYPEN and others attracted 1.2 million concertgoers to 90 performances, according to HYBE.

Melissa Thomas
Executive vp of international marketing for U.S. repertoire, Sony Music Entertainment

Talita Zuiderveld
Head of global promotions for U.S. international, Sony Music Entertainment

Chanel Auguste
Director of international marketing, Sony Music Entertainment

Kaitlin Reid
Associate director of digital and commercial strategy, Sony Music Entertainment

Katherine Griffith
Associate director of international marketing, Sony Music Entertainment

In an increasingly global music industry, "hits and stories can spark from anywhere around the world," Thomas says. Viral popularity in Southeast Asia, among other markets, helped push SZA's "Kill Bill" to No. 1 on the Billboard Global 200 and Meghan Trainor's "Made You Look" to No. 11 on the Hot 100, while 22-year-old Tyla emerged from South Africa to reach No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart. Meanwhile, Miley Cyrus' "Flowers" was IFPI's top-selling global single in 2023. "We are highly focused," Thomas says, "on building campaigns that captivate and engage fans from every corner of the globe."

Pieter van Rijn
President of Downtown Music, Downtown Music Holdings

Ben Patterson
President of artist and label services, Downtown Music Holdings

Christiaan Kröner
President of FUGA, Downtown Music Holdings

Christine Barnum
Chief revenue officer, CD Baby/Downtown Music Holdings

Across its many divisions, Downtown flexed its "full strength" in 2023, van Rijn says. In the last year, Downtown purchased royalty processing company Curve Royalty Systems, combined Adrev and FUGA to help bolster monetization for user-generated content and established new partnerships with BandLab and Spirit Music Group. "Powering creativity for rights holders has been at the core of Downtown's mission since its inception," van Rijn says. "We are proud to have continued the expansion of our businesses globally across the group."

Eric Wong
President/chief marketing officer of recorded music, Warner Music Group

Simon Robson
President of international recorded music, Warner Music Group

Jess Keeley-Carter
Executive vp of global marketing, Warner Music International

Among Warner Music's international stars, an Udo Lindenberg track topped the German chart for 21 weeks, Bolaget ruled Sweden's chart for 14 weeks and Gobs held down the No. 1 spot in Denmark for 10 weeks. Robson says the company is eager to use collaborations as a tool to cross international borders, and has helped pair Ninho with Central Cee, Ed Sheeran with 1.Cuz — and Warner Music Canada with Warner Music India on the joint venture 91 North Records. Another collaboration, Karol G and Aldo Ranks' "WATATI," peaked at No. 2 in Panama and No. 4 in Honduras on Monitor Latino thanks to Wong's team, which was instrumental in pushing *Barbie: The*

Album — on which "WATATI" appears alongside songs from Dua Lipa and Charli XCX — around the globe.

MUSIC GROUPS EUROPE

Frank Briegmann
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music Central Europe and Deutsche Grammophon, Universal Music Group

Oliver Nusse
CEO, Universal France and Universal Music Africa, Universal Music Group

Frank Kacou
Managing director, Universal Music Africa, Universal Music Group

In September, Briegmann opened the Universal Inside showcase in Berlin, which he declared was "dedicated to hip-hop" in honor of the genre's 50th anniversary, and unveiled Universal's YOUniverse, an interactive platform developed by Universal Music Central Europe. Nusse says, "We are very proud to be pioneers in France" in UMG's partnership with French digital music service Deezer in launching an artist-centric streaming model, which aims to reward artists and songs that are driving listener engagement. Ahead of the Africa Cup of Nations finals in January, Kacou oversaw the release of an EP showcasing several African artists including Yemi Alade, Magic System, Didi B, Roselyne, Layo, Serge Beynaud, Kerozen, CYsoul, Vegedream, Ayanne, Kaaris and Josey.

Fabian Drebes
Doreen Schimk
Co-presidents, Warner Music Central Europe

Mark Fry
President, Warner Music Nordics

Alfonso Perez-Soto
President, emerging markets, Warner Music Group

Alain Veille
President, Warner Music France

Niels Walboomers
President, recorded music and publishing, Benelux, Warner Music Group

Temi Adeniji
Managing director, Warner Music Africa

Warner Music Central Europe, under Drebes and Schimk, in partnership with Warner Chappell Music Germany, under vp Natascha Augustin, led WMG colleagues in celebrating the September opening of a creative hub in Berlin to bring together international artists, songwriters and producers while also serving its employees. The facility, built on the top floor of the historic Schicklerhaus in the central Berlin borough of Mitte, boasts an interior performance space, rooftop terraces and collaboration rooms featuring cutting-edge technology such as Dolby Atmos immersive sound. WMG CEO Robert Kyncl led a guest list of more than 700 attendees at the grand opening, including WMG artists and songwriters and figures from music, entertainment and politics.

Miley Cyrus' "Flowers," promoted worldwide by Sony Music Entertainment, became the top-selling global single of 2023, as ranked by IFPI.

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

Tony Harlow
CEO, Warner Music U.K.

Victor Aroldross
Senior vp of international marketing, Warner Music U.K.

"Before superstar status comes artist development, and, as always, it remains at the very heart of our function," says Aroldross, who works with Warner Music U.K.'s roster, including Coldplay, Dua Lipa, Ed Sheeran, Fred again.. and PinkPantheress. Under Harlow, who oversees front-line British labels Atlantic, Parlophone, Rhino and Warner Records, as well as ADA U.K., the company achieved breakthroughs with Griff and Maisie Peters, while Sheeran celebrated multiple successes in 2023. His sixth and seventh albums, - *(Subtract)* and *Autumn Variations*, both topped the U.K. Official Albums chart and debuted in the top five of the Billboard 200.

Jason Iley
Chairman/CEO, Sony Music U.K. and Ireland

Sony Music-signed or -affiliated artists topped the U.K. Official Singles chart for a combined 28 weeks in 2023, including Miley Cyrus' 10 weeks at No. 1 with "Flowers" — the top song in the United Kingdom last year with 198 million streams, according to the Official Charts Company. Hit records by SZA, Doja Cat, Libianca, Tyla, Tate McRae, Cassö and Calvin Harris (in collaboration with Ellie Goulding) rounded out a successful 12 months for Sony Music, which relaunched Epic Records U.K. as a front-line label last May. "After reorganizing our labels, we're proud of our recent chart success," says Iley, who celebrated 10 years at the helm in April.

David Joseph
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music U.K. & Ireland

Selina Webb
Executive vp, Universal Music U.K.

Joseph singles out "two truly global moments" as highlights of the past 18 months. The first was the release of *Hackney Diamonds*, The Rolling Stones' first album of original material in 18 years, which topped the charts in 20 countries, according to UMG. The second was The Beatles' final song, "Now and Then," which reached No. 1 in the United Kingdom and No. 7 on the Hot 100. "I genuinely think both campaigns will be looked at for many years as best-in-class examples of U.K. creativity exporting to the world," says Joseph, who oversees the EMI, Decca, Island, Polydor and 0207 Def Jam labels, as well as Abbey Road Studios.

Daniel Lieberberg
President of Sony Music Continental Europe and Africa, Sony Music Entertainment

Patrick Mushatsi-Kareba
CEO of Germany, Switzerland and Austria, Sony Music Entertainment

Marie-Anne Robert
President, Sony Music France

Belgian producer Lost Frequencies, Germany's Purple Disco Machine and 2021 Eurovision winner Måneskin from Italy are among the acts that brought success last year for Sony Music Continental Europe under Lieberberg, who also guided the company's growth in Africa. Mushatsi-Kareba has advocated for diversity and, in partnership with the nonprofit artist association Music Women* Germany, helped create the Female* Producer Prize to support and promote the careers of rising female-identifying producers across Germany. Robert participated in the March launch of IFPI's 2024 Global Music Report and spoke of artists switching "from distribution to artist contracts" so labels could oversee their legal and marketing needs.

Alistair Norbury
President of U.K. repertoire and marketing, BMG

Kylie Minogue, *Billboard*'s 2024 Women in Music Icon honoree, drove fans to dancefloors around the world with the global success of "Padam Padam," which was her biggest U.S. hit in 20 years and won the Grammy Award for best pop dance recording in February. The song propelled the album *Tension* to No. 21 on the Billboard 200, her best showing since 2010. "Together with the accolades from the Grammys and *Billboard* awards, plus the triumph of [her] Las Vegas [residency]," Norbury says, "Kylie's success shows how BMG's global focus can help artists deliver creatively, critically and commercially."

MUSIC GROUPS LATIN

Alejandro Duque
President, Warner Music Latin America

Leila Oliveira
President, Warner Music Brazil

Tomas Rodríguez
President of Warner Music Mexico & Central America, Warner Music Mexico

"Lala" from Puerto Rico's **Myke Towers**, released through Warner Music Latin America, topped the Billboard Global 200 Excl. U.S. chart in July.

RANDY HOLMES/DISNEY/GETTY IMAGES

THE HOTTEST HITS OUTSIDE THE U.S.*

RANK	TITLE	ARTIST
1	"SEVEN"	Jung Kook Featuring Latto
2	"FLOWERS"	Miley Cyrus
3	"CRUEL SUMMER"	Taylor Swift
4	"CALM DOWN"	Rema & Selena Gomez
5	"DIE FOR YOU"	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande
6	"IDOL"	Yoasobi
7	"LA BEBE"	Yng Lvcas x Peso Pluma
8	"AS IT WAS"	Harry Styles
9	"DAYLIGHT"	David Kushner
10	"SAVE YOUR TEARS"	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande

*BASED ON THE BILLBOARD GLOBAL EXCL.U.S. CHART FROM APRIL 8, 2023, THROUGH MARCH 8, 2024. THE CHART RANKS THE TOP SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND/OR SALES ACTIVITY FROM MORE THAN 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD, EXCLUDING THE UNITED STATES, AS TRACKED BY LUMINATE. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL-ONLY STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE.

Guillermo González Arévalo
President, Warner Music Iberia

Warner Music Latin America's "domestic strategy in each market, partnered with our regional infrastructure and Warner Music's global marketing teams," led the company to continue growing its market share in 2023, Duque says. It achieved "record-breaking" results with its multigenre, multicountry roster, he adds. Hits included "Lala" by Puerto Rico's Myke Towers and "La Bebe" by Mexico's Yng Lvcas. The former topped the Billboard Global 200 Excl. U.S. chart and earned Towers a No. 1 on the Latin Airplay chart. Elsewhere, domestic hits included "Los del Espacio" by Lit Killah, Maria Becerra and Tiago PZK in Argentina; Blessd's *Si Sabe* album release in Colombia; and Quevedo's success in his native Spain and globally, which earned him his first top 10 on a *Billboard* albums chart.

Jesús López
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music Latin America/ Iberian Peninsula

Narcís Rebollo Melció
President, Universal Music Iberian Peninsula

Alfredo Delgadillo
President/CEO, Universal Music Mexico

Luis Estrada
President, Universal Music Southern Cone

Paulo Lima
President, Universal Music Brazil

Manuel Peña
Managing director, Universal Music Andean Region & Central America

Universal's ability to break local artists at an international level was on display again with the "remarkable international success of Feid," López says. Feid ended the year as the sixth most-streamed artist globally on Spotify and debuted at No. 1 on the platform's global chart with his albums *Mor, No le Temas a la Oscuridad* and *Ferxxocalipsis*. He was also a top five artist of the year on Vevo, in the top 10 of *Billboard*'s U.S. year-end Latin artists and sold out his 2023 Ferxxo Nitro Jam Underground U.S. tour in 30 minutes, according to the label. The Colombian star also played sold-out shows in Germany, Switzerland, Italy and France, underscoring his growing international appeal. And in December, according to Universal Music, Spain's Aitana became the first Spanish artist to sell out Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium — and did so in a record-setting 72 hours.

Afo Verde
Chairman/CEO, Sony Music Latin-Iberia

Maria Fernandez
Executive vp/COO, Sony Music Latin-Iberia

Fernando Cabral
Executive vp of business development, Sony Music Latin-Iberia

Damian Amato
President, Sony Music Hispanic South America

Jose Maria Barbat
President, Sony Music Iberia

Paulo Junqueiro
President, Sony Music Brazil

Roberto López
President, Sony Music Mexico

Warner Music Australia and ADA artist **Behani**, a Melbourne native with Persian and Italian roots, broke through with "Real Man" featuring Ne-Yo.

GRAHAM DENHOLM/GETTY IMAGES

Under Verde, Sony's Latin-Iberia team coordinated the sensational global launch of Shakira's *Las Mujeres No Lloran*. In Mexico, López highlights the international success of Natalia Lafourcade — signed 24 years ago — who hit a high with two Latin Grammys and one Grammy for her 2022 album, *De Todas las Flores*. In Brazil, DENNIS and Kevin o Chris' "Tá Ok" was a No. 1 hit, while Luísa Sonza is poised for an international breakthrough. In Argentina, Amato applauds the success of pop band Miranda! throughout South America with its album *Hotel Miranda*. In Spain, Barbat says he remains focused on developing new talent like Ana Mena, while being "attentive to signing consolidated artists with high international and mainstream relevance" like Alejandro Sanz. Regionwide, Cabral highlighted the expansion of Sony's partnership with European ticketing company CTS Eventim, which resulted in the launch of Eventim Brazil and the acquisition of Punto Ticket in Chile and Teleticket in Peru.

MUSIC GROUPS AUSTRALASIA

Andrew Chan
CEO, Greater China, Sony Music Entertainment

Vanessa Picken
Chair/CEO, Sony Music Entertainment Australia and New Zealand

Shridhar Subramaniam
President, corporate strategy and market development, Asia and Middle East, Sony Music Entertainment

Vinit Thakkar
Managing director, India, Sony Music Entertainment

Chan oversees the Greater China region including Taiwan and Hong Kong and has signed emerging artists such as Jasmine Yen to RCA Records Greater China, a label he launched in 2022. Last year, artist Amy Shark, under Sony Music Australia's Picken, became the first Australian artist to have an artist-led radio show on Apple Music, reaching 167 countries. Subramaniam, responsible for Sony's strategy and market development in Asia and the Middle East, is focused on two of the world's fastest-growing regions for music sales. Thakkar joined Sony in 2023 after previously serving as COO of Universal Music India.

Joseph Chang
Co-CEO, Kakao Entertainment; board member, SM Entertainment

Jang Cheol Hyuk
Tak Young Jun
Co-CEOs, SM Entertainment

Lee Sung Su
Chief A&R officer, SM Entertainment

As K-pop — and the companies behind it — expands globally, the 2023 North American merger of SM Entertainment (aespa, NCT, RIIZE) and Kakao Entertainment America (IVE) was "a milestone," Chang says, "and a precedent for the next steps in building a multinational business system for all artists and labels under our care." The joint venture quickly expanded across the Atlantic by partnering with British entertainment company Moon&Back to launch a British boy band through an upcoming reality TV show. In addition, IVE, a girl group on Kakao's label Starship Entertainment, is on its first global tour, which included six U.S. arena dates in March.

Chris Gobalakrishna
Jonathan Serbin
Co-presidents, Warner Music Asia

Dan Rosen
President, Warner Music Australasia

Jay Mehta
Managing director, Warner Music South Asia and Warner Music India

Under Gobalakrishna and Serbin, Warner Music China last year signed Elva Hsiao, one of Greater China's most successful artists. In October, they named Dinesh Ratnam managing director of Warner Music Malaysia; Ratnam previously played a pivotal role in the international expansion of iQiyi, a leading premium video on-demand streaming service in the market. In March, Rosen welcomed Behani, an artist with Persian and Italian roots from Melbourne, Australia, to Warner Music Australia and ADA. She broke through in 2023 with "Real Man" (featuring Ne-Yo), which reached No. 2 on Australia's Shazam chart, according to Warner Music. Under Mehta, Warner Music South Asia will further promote repertoire from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the home to over 400 million people. Mehta remains in his role leading Warner Music India.

Matt Gudinski
Chairman/CEO, Mushroom Group

With Gudinski at the helm, the Melbourne, Australia-based independent music giant celebrated its 50th anniversary with a yearlong slate of special events, releases, merchandise and an all-star concert at Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena in November featuring scores of Mushroom acts performing originals and classic songs from across the company's catalog. The business built by Gudinski's late father, legendary entrepreneur Michael Gudinski, "saw success across our entire group," Matt says. The standout: the second of Ed Sheeran's record-setting performances at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, with 112,000 in attendance.

Katsumi Kuroiwa
CEO, Avex

The multifaceted Japanese music company Avex — through a partnership with AEG Presents branded as AEGX — hosted Ed Sheeran's +-=÷x Tour in Japan in January, as well as Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour at the Tokyo Dome in February, a run that marked the first time a non-Japanese female artist performed at the venue for four consecutive days. Avex's U.S. imprint, Avex USA, has grown its publishing roster with recent signings including an administration deal with producer Ambezza (Future and Drake's "Life Is Good") and a co-publishing deal with GENT! (Doja Cat's "Agora Hills") in collaboration with Brandon Silverstein's S10 Entertainment.

Cussion Pang
Chairman, Tencent Music Entertainment Group

Ross Liang
CEO/board member, Tencent Music Entertainment Group

Tencent Music Entertainment, China's largest music streaming company, is in a state of flux. Last year, revenue from social entertainment and other services declined 34% to $1.5 billion. Music streaming, however, is booming. Subscription revenue from apps QQ Music, Kugou Music and Kuwo Music rose 39.1% to $1.7 billion, and the number of paying customers rose 20.6% to 106.7 million. As the product improved — long-form audio, livestreaming and exclusive release windows — the free-to-paid conversion rate climbed from 18% in 2022 to 24% in 2023.

Timothy Xu
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music Greater China

Calvin Wong
CEO, Universal Music Southeast Asia; senior vp of Asia, Universal Music Group

Devraj Sanyal
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music India and South Asia; senior vp of strategy, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa, Universal Music Group

Patrick Boulos
CEO, Universal Music Middle East and North Africa

Naoshi Fujikura
President/CEO, Universal Music Japan

Sean Warner
President, Universal Music Australia and New Zealand

In September, Universal Music Group named Xu to oversee Greater China, which includes mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the veteran executive has since signed a global distribution deal with Jay Chou, the first artist from China to appear in the top 10 of IFPI's global artist chart. In Southeast Asia, under Wong, UMG acquired a majority control of Thailand's RS Group, a leading music distributor and artist management group. For Universal Music India, Sanyal's brand partnership with Coca-Cola led to the hit "Khalasi" by Aditya Gadhvi and Achint. Released through Coke Studio Bharat, the song has 5 billion cumulative video views, according to UMG.

STREAMING

Dan Chalmers
Director of Europe, the Middle East and Africa, YouTube Music

Sandra Jimenez
Head of music for Latin America and U.S. Latin, YouTube Music

Paul Smith
Managing director, Asia Pacific, YouTube Music

Nur Ozdamar
Lead of Europe, the Middle East and Africa artist and label development, YouTube Music

YouTube's focus on fostering growth and innovation in areas such as short-form content and AI has resulted in success for the iconic brand. Both YouTube Premium and YouTube Music surpassed 100 million subscribers, while Shorts climbed to an average of over 70 billion daily views, with the number of channels uploading Shorts growing more than 50% year over year, according to the company. Additionally, YouTube's Music AI Incubator — made in collaboration with a global slate of artists — and AI Principles proved to be formative steps in protecting artists and fostering creativity in a world where AI is increasingly prevalent.

Phil Choi
Managing director, Boomplay

Boomplay is committed to bringing African music to the global stage and, last year, African superstar Burna Boy made history by becoming the first artist to reach 1 billion streams on the app, according to Boomplay. The launch of Boomlive, an audio livestreaming feature of the app, has bridged the gap between artists and their fans by providing a direct channel of live communication and giving artists an additional tool for promotion and the monetization of their brand. "It has been a long road," Choi says, "but the success of African music on the global stage and domestically has further strengthened our commitment to developing the African music industry to reach a wider audience."

Bruno Crolot
Head of international music, Spotify

Andy Sloan Vincent
Head of global music programs, Spotify

Annika Walsh
Head of international music strategy, Spotify

While Crolot says that 2023 was "jam-packed for Spotify on all fronts," he's especially proud of the continued focus on "championing artists and musical genres from every corner of the world." In February 2023, the company debuted its personalized AI guide — called DJ — in beta in the United States and Canada. It expanded into the United Kingdom and Ireland, as well as select markets in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. "[Our] tools and programs can create magic," Crolot says. "Somewhere, a fan will get to discover for the very first time an artist that will become a favorite and a lasting connection will be created, no matter the geographical and linguistic barriers."

Paul Firth
Director of global music industry, Amazon Music

Claire Imoucha
Head of Amazon Music, Spain

Keisuke Oishi
GM/director, Amazon Music, Japan

Imoucha cites Amazon Music's livestream of the 2023 Primavera Sound Festival in Spain as a significant international achievement for the company. "Being able to delight music fans around the world and bring this world-class festival, packed with artist performances, interviews and behind-the-scenes moments, to them at home was a real highlight," she says. Millions tuned in digitally to watch performances from the Barcelona event by headliners such as Blur and Kendrick Lamar on Amazon Music's Twitch channel.

According to African music streaming company Boomplay, Nigeria's **Burna Boy** was the first artist to reach 1 billion streams on the app.

NOOR-U-NISA KHAN FOR WWD

RIGHTS GROUPS IN IFPI'S TOP 10 MUSIC MARKETS

1. United States
ASCAP
BMI
Global Music Rights
Harry Fox Agency
Mechanical Licensing Collective
SESAC
SoundExchange

2. Japan
CPRA/Geindankyo
JASRAC

3. United Kingdom
MCPS
PPL
PRS

4. Germany
GEMA
GVL

5. China
MCSC

6. France
SACEM
SCPP

7. South Korea
KOMCA
RIAK

8. Canada
Re:Sound
SOCAN

9. Brazil
ABRAMUS
AMAR
ASSIM
SBACEM
SBAT
SICAM
Socinpro
UBC

10. Australia
AMCOS
APRA
PPCA

Sources: ASCAP, BMI, CISAC, IFPI, SoundExchange

Georges Fornay
Deputy CEO, Qobuz
Dan Mackta
Managing director, North America and Northern Europe, Qobuz

Qobuz is "consistently outpacing market benchmarks" as the streaming service has expanded its global reach into 26 countries, Mackta says. The high-resolution streaming service has spread into the Canadian market (both French- and English-speaking territories) and recently partnered with Festival Bach Montreal and Off-Bach, the annual three-week classical music festival in Montreal. The move happened after recent launches in Northern Europe, Australia and New Zealand in 2021 and Latin America in 2022, as well as the acquisition of Japanese music company e-Onkyo. Qobuz also partnered with the Jerry Garcia Family, the artist's estate, to bring the late Grateful Dead member's full catalog and exclusive playlists to the service.

Maria Garrido
Chief marketing officer, Deezer

In September, Deezer and Universal Music Group launched a plan to increase streaming royalty payments by roughly 10% for performers who meet a minimum number of monthly streams. The French streaming company, whose CEO Jeronimo Folgueira left in March, also rebranded itself with a new logo and a new identity as an "experiences platform" and has reached record-high subscription numbers, according to Garrido. "It was an exciting challenge to bring together the essence of the company's DNA," she says, "with a company purpose revolving around helping people belong through music."

Emmy Lovell
Global head of music, SoundCloud
Ama Walton
Senior vp of music licensing/deputy general counsel, SoundCloud
Hazel Savage
Vp of music intelligence, SoundCloud

SoundCloud's major achievement of 2023 was launching its artist development program, Ascending, which highlights emerging artists monthly. Ascending promoted talents like Kenya Grace, whose album *Strangers* has become a mainstay on users' playlists since. "I feel like the industry is really taking note of the A&R gold mine that exists on SoundCloud to find and amplify new talent," Lovell says, adding that the success of artists on SoundCloud motivates her to continue spotlighting emerging acts and connecting them to fans.

Charles Morgan
Chief marketing officer, The Beatport Group

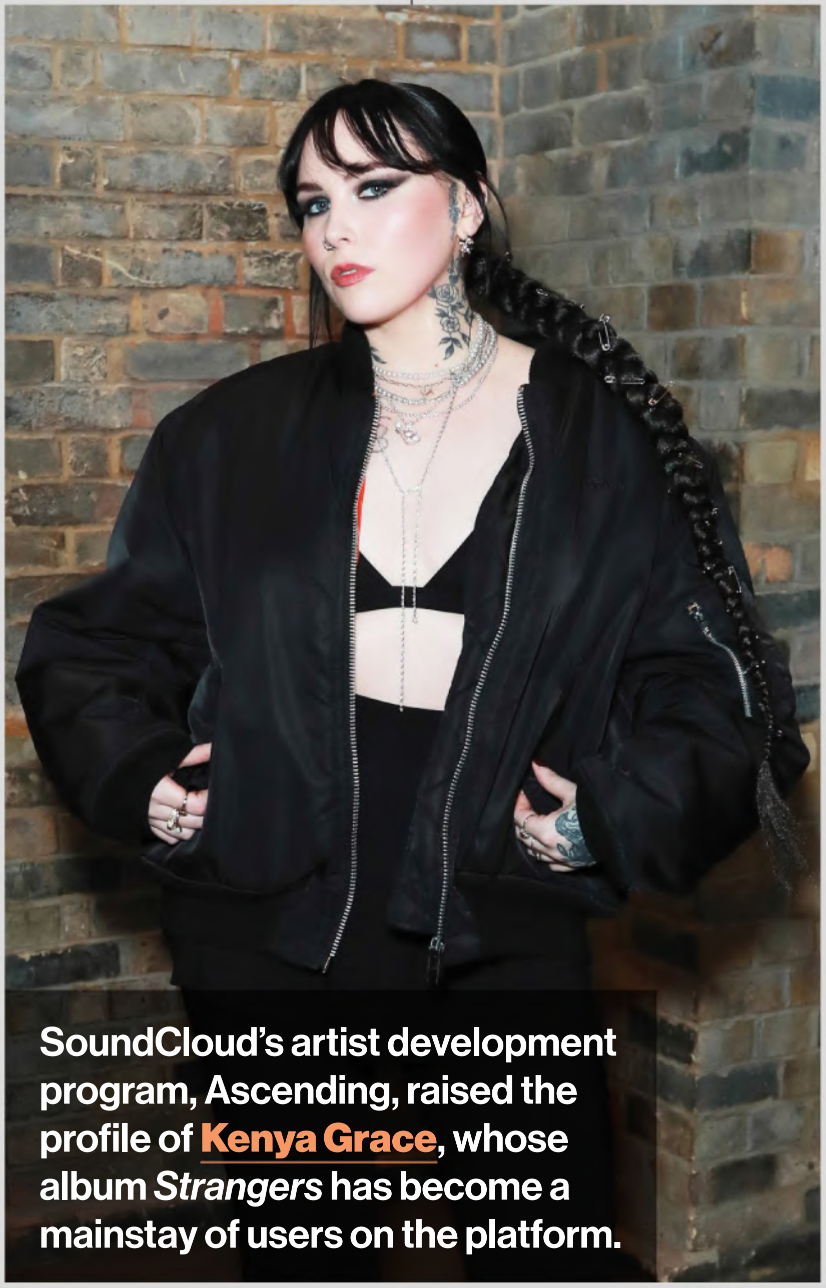
This year, Beatport is celebrating 20 years of serving the DJ community and expanding its international presence. Morgan notes the company's introduction to key new territories across Europe, the United Kingdom and South America as a highlight. "After listening to our audience around the world, we've also rebuilt Beatportal into a community-first storytelling hub that offers DJs and producers unfiltered access to their audience," Morgan says, "further driving exceptional profitability in emerging markets and helping position our ecosystem as the top choice for DJs and producers worldwide."

Ola Sars
Founder/CEO, Soundtrack Your Brand

Soundtrack Your Brand, the background streaming music service for businesses launched by Sars, has licensees in 74 countries with a music catalog of more than 100 million tracks. International clients using the service include Ikea, Lululemon, Uniqlo and Tag Heuer. "I'm proud to have spearheaded the close of Soundtrack Your Brand's $15 million pre-growth round in 2023," Sars says, "led by Matt Pincus' MUSIC and followed by [investment from] Willard Ahdritz and Matt Spetzler."

Jen Walsh
Senior director, Apple
Juan Paz
Global head of Latin music business, Apple Music

In March 2023, Apple proudly unveiled its Apple Music Classical app in Apple Music markets except Greater China, Japan and South Korea. Since then, Apple has expanded its availability to those areas as well, "bringing the world's largest classical catalog and ultimate classical experience to more music fans around the globe," Walsh says. "Classical music is foundational for music lovers everywhere, and we are working with some of the most prolific classical artists and institutions in the world to celebrate and showcase the experience in this new stand-alone app."



SoundCloud's artist development program, Ascending, raised the profile of **Kenya Grace**, whose album *Strangers* has become a mainstay of users on the platform.

DAVE BENETT/GETTY IMAGES

LABELS & DISTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Allen
Jo Charrington
Co-presidents, EMI Records

Under the joint leadership of Allen and Charrington, EMI Records strengthened its position as one of the top U.K. imprints in 2023. Chart successes included No. 1 albums by Lewis Capaldi, Sam Smith, Take That, Metallica, Shania Twain and Taylor Swift, who had the year's second- and third-biggest-selling albums in the United Kingdom with *Midnights* and *1989 (Taylor's Version)*, respectively, according to the Official Charts Company. Caity Baser, Olivia Dean and Mae Stephens are among the recent breakthroughs for EMI, which integrated Capitol Records into the wider U.K. label group in 2022. Last year's launch of EMI North, a new imprint based in Leeds, England, made EMI the first British major label to have a physical office outside of London.

Tricia Arnold
Executive vp of global artist/label services and sales, The Orchard
Prashant Bahadur
Executive vp/head of strategy, The Orchard
Erol Cichowski
Jason Pascal
Executive vps of global artist and label partnerships, The Orchard

The Orchard marked "another record year" in 2023, Bahadur says, adding that clients "continue to break records and boundaries and lead the way in bringing local music to global audiences." The distribution and artist services company worked with Double P/Parjin Parlay Records to release Peso Pluma's *Génesis*, which debuted at No. 3 on the Billboard 200 in July; the Mexican singer also landed at No. 12 on *Billboard*'s year-end Top Artists chart. "Additional successful releases from Bizarrap, Yoasobi, Jorja Smith, IVE, Nas, Riar Saab, DPR IAN and more," Bahadur says, "continue to grow The Orchard's profile as a global industry leader."

Stacey Bedford
CEO, Bandzoogle

Bandzoogle, the Ottawa, Ontario-based online platform that provides a one-stop shop for independent musicians to build professional websites, celebrated its 20th year in 2023. The site has expanded its options over the years, now offering musicians online press kits, direct marketing and merchandise sales, and expanded its global reach in the process. "One of our main goals is to help make it easier for musicians to make money from their music by selling directly to

Canada's **Karan Aujla** won two Juno Awards in March, including breakthrough artist of the year.

their fans," Bedford says. "Seeing our members make over $16.4 million in sales through their websites last year, all commission-free, is truly rewarding for our whole team."

Pascal Bittard
President, IDOL

French digital distributor IDOL has spent the past year "focused on developing its international divisions by making key signings and hires in the U.S., U.K. and Germany," Bittard says. Among its moves to support that goal: bringing artists like Afro B and Erick the Architect to TOKiMONSTA's Young Art Records. Meanwhile, IDOL has become more partner-friendly by dedicating an audience development manager to each client. IDOL also kept expanding its head office and international teams in 2024, with local operations spread across Paris, London, Berlin, New York, Los Angeles, Nashville and Johannesburg.

Louis Bloom
President, Island Records U.K.

Steven Rowen
Senior vp/head of international, Island Records

In December, when the finalists for the Rising Star Award at the 2024 BRIT Awards were announced, two of the three acts — The Last Dinner Party and Sekou — were signed to Island Records U.K. (EMI Records singer Caity Baser was the third), with the honor eventually going to The Last Dinner Party. In April 2023, three of Bloom's signings — Marcus Mumford, Hozier and Dermot Kennedy — shared a Royal Albert Hall bill in London for a War Child benefit concert. In the United States, Rowen has guided the global rise of Sabrina Carpenter, including linking her with Filipino dance influencer Niana Guerrero in July to create a dance trend for Carpenter's single "Feather."

Alec Boateng
Alex Boateng
Co-presidents, 0207 Def Jam

Marisa Lauro-Norris
Former senior vp of international, Def Jam Recordings

In the United Kingdom, twin brothers Alec and Alex Boateng have built on the success of grime star Stormzy — most recently through a collaboration with Indo Canadian artist AP Dhillon on "Problems Over Peace." In the United States, 18-year Def Jam Recordings veteran Lauro-Norris guided international campaigns in the past year for new 0207 Def Jam signing JayO as well as Def Jam U.S. acts like Grammy Award winner Coco Jones, Nigerian superstar Adekunle Gold and American rapper Armani White. (As of March, Lauro-Harris is no longer with Def Jam.)

Lilas Bourboulon
Tim Dellow
Toby L
Company directors/co-CEOs, Transgressive

Transgressive's Toby L says the company's past year was defined by creative and commercial growth in three core areas: the label (with releases from Flume, Arlo Parks, Alvvays, Julia Jacklin, Mykki Blanco and The WAEVE), publishing (extension of a catalog agreement with Foals; new deals with Black Country, New Road and HotWax; and a top three album on the U.K. Official Albums chart from Loyle Carner) and management (Wesley Joseph's signing to Secretly Canadian and new albums from Marika Hackman and musician-actor Johnny Flynn). "Next year marks 20 years of the company," Toby L says, "and with new staff hires and a North American office opening on the horizon, there's a lot to look forward to."

Jorge Brea
Founder/CEO, Symphonic Distribution

Janette Berrios
Vp of corporate marketing, Symphonic Distribution

Brea says his company has been expanding its global footprint across continents, from the Americas to Africa and Europe, while also making technological advancements through its in-house tech team. "Our proprietary platform, featuring enhancements like SplitShare, Recoupments and TransferTrack, compares to those of major labels," he says. "Our financial performance reflects our team's dedication and effective leadership, demonstrated by a 50% annual growth rate, $100 million in revenue and over $40 million in support from private equity firms."

Kristen Burke
President, Warner Music Canada

The only female head of a major label in Canada, Burke initiated Warner Music's move from the Toronto suburbs to its downtown headquarters at The Well, where she has continued her forward-thinking strategy. Warner Music Canada partnered with Warner Music India to create 91 North Records, focused on artists of South Asian heritage. "This venture … leverages the market potential of uniting two distinct fan bases … a bridge between the East and West," she says. To further that mission, Warner Music Canada directly signed Karan Aujla, a Canadian artist born in India, who won two Juno Awards in March, including breakthrough artist of the year.

Caitlin Cadden
Director of global marketing, Warner Music Nashville

One highlight of WMN's global success has been singer-songwriter Bailey Zimmerman, whose *Religiously. The Album.* reached No. 7 on the Billboard 200, No. 3 on Top Country Albums and No. 8 on Canadian Albums — and also No. 3 on the Australian Recording Industry Association's country albums chart. Zimmerman topped Australia's Ridin' Hearts festival in the fall and will headline a U.K. tour in May. "International growth is one of our top priorities," Cadden says. "We are strategically investing in our artists; going international is no longer a wait-and-see game."

Domingo Chávez
CEO, REMEX

Chávez highlights Edwin Luna y la Trakalosa and Jessi Uribe's collaboration, "Te la Debo," released in March, as well as live performances by talent including Leandro Ríos and Pablo Montero as REMEX's latest achievements. He also celebrates the growth of the label's YouTube channel (with over 7.2 million subscribers) and REMEX's growth beyond Mexico and the United States. "More than five years ago, we opened new markets in countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia," Chávez says, "and soon [we will also be in] Chile, Peru, Bolivia and Argentina."

CINDY ORD/GETTY IMAGES

Platoon artist **Ayra Starr**, from Nigeria, earned a Grammy Award nomination for best African music performance.

Rob Cowling
GM, Gallo Music

Two years shy of its centennial, Gallo Music — South Africa's largest and oldest independent label — could easily rest on its laurels as a market leader. But last year, Gallo won South African Music Awards for Afropop star Nathi Mankayi and adult contemporary singer Louise Carver. It also rolled out new albums from Grammy Award-winning act Ladysmith Black Mambazo and singer-songwriter Vusi Mahlasela, who is known as "The Voice of South Africa." "The continent of Africa," Cowling says, "is still showing off its unstoppable talent and signs of growth."

Brianne Deslippe
Senior vp of global marketing and strategy, Big Loud Records

"The past year has been a landmark one for our company," Deslippe says of Nashville-based Big Loud Records, which expanded its business with offices and label managers in London and Brisbane, Australia, while bolstering its already established office in Toronto. The label also supported 17 of its artists on international festivals and tour dates. In particular, Morgan Wallen made strong strides internationally with his sold-out U.K. debut at O2 Arena in London, sellouts in Australia and New Zealand, the release of his *Abbey Road Sessions* and a No. 1 all-genre album debut (*One Thing at a Time*) in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Denzyl Feigelson
Founder/CEO, Platoon

Platoon's success was validated this year when it became a player at the Grammy Awards for the first time with six nominations for its artists, including Ayra Starr, who was up for best African music performance. The nomination for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel's *Fandango* in the best engineered album, classical category followed a strong investment in the classical market by the artist services company. "For me, it always comes down to the artists, their careers, passion and creativity," Feigelson says. "Our job at Platoon is to help them realize their dreams."

Kenny Gates
Co-founder/CEO, [PIAS]

Michel Lambot
Co-founder, [PIAS]

Gates says [PIAS] hit its high note in March, "partnering with Nick Cave, one of our all-time musical heroes, and his management team to license his incredible new album, *Wild God*." The 10-track set by Cave and his band The Bad Seeds will arrive Aug. 30 through Cave's own Bad Seed label through an exclusive worldwide licensing agreement with the [PIAS] imprint Play It Again Sam. "In my opinion, [it's] his best ever, and we will go over the barricades to deliver the global success it deserves," Gates told *Billboard* when the deal was announced.

Archie Gormley
Head of international, Big Machine Label Group

Last year, Big Machine Label Group released Dolly Parton's *Rockstar*, which debuted in the top 20 on *Billboard*'s Canadian Albums chart and the top five on the Official U.K. Albums chart. The set, with tracks that featured Steven Tyler, Sting, Ann Wilson, Stevie Nicks and more, also reached No. 1 on the Official Americana Albums chart and No. 3 on the Australian Recording Industry Association's Top 40 Country Albums chart. "Our whole team felt immensely privileged to play a part in working the Dolly Parton album last year," Gormley says, and was "proud to deliver her career-best week-one album chart positions internationally outside North America."

Jurgen Grebner
Executive vp of international marketing, Interscope Capitol Labels Group

"As we continue to work with our artists to build global brands, the past 12 months have seen a number of important successes," says Grebner, who cites Olivia Rodrigo's second album, *GUTS*, a No. 1 debut in 13 countries, and Reneé Rapp's *Snow Angel*, a top 10 debut on the U.K. Official Albums chart. Other high points include Karol G, who charted nine of the 10 songs on *Mañana Será Bonito (Bichota Season)*, and Billie Eilish, who hit No. 1 in Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Switzerland — and won her second Academy Award — with "What Was I Made For?" In March, Universal Music Group unveiled its newly restructured West Coast label operation under the banner Interscope Capitol Labels Group.

Donna Gryn
Chief marketing officer, Republic Records

Stephanie Perez
Senior vp of marketing strategy, Republic Records

"We've been simultaneously strategic and aggressive with our international strategy over the last year," says Gryn, who, along with Perez, was promoted to a new post earlier this year. That approach "really made an impact worldwide," Gryn adds, citing Noah Kahan's major breakout in the United Kingdom with "Stick Season" (seven weeks at No. 1) and Ireland (14 weeks at No. 1). Meanwhile, the single's namesake album also clinched No. 1 for multiple weeks in Canada, Ireland and The Netherlands. Ariana Grande's long-awaited *Eternal Sunshine* claimed No. 1 in over 10 markets, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and The Netherlands. Republic is collaborating with Anitta to globalize Brazilian funk with the singer's new album, *Funk Generation*.

Tor Hanson
Co-founder, Redeye Worldwide

Michael Petkov
Head of international, Redeye Worldwide

"2023 has been Redeye's biggest year internationally," Petkov says of the music services company, which was acquired by Exceleration Music in September. The deal gives Redeye access to the independent music company's resources and expertise. "What has been an ongoing story of growth and progress took another big step forward last year across all markets," Petkov says. "I am incredibly proud of the team and the company as a whole for achieving this milestone."

Drew Hill
Deputy CEO, Utopia Music

Hill oversees Utopia Music's U.K.-based physical distribution businesses, Utopia Distribution Services and Proper Music Group. In August, he relocated UDS to a new warehouse northwest of London, in Bicester, where it serves clients including Universal and Sony. "The site's output quickly grew to shipping more than 750,000 units a week and exceeded 3 million for the month of November," Hill says. Distributing an estimated 70% of the United Kingdom's physical music "will ensure the industry has a fit-for-purpose supply chain for many years to come," he says. In February 2023, Proper Music Group received the Queen's Award for Enterprise for increasing exports by 85% in three years.

Paul Hitchman
COO, AWAL

Ben Akinbola
Head of growth, AWAL

Artists Laufey and Djo are AWAL's biggest successes to date. Over the past year, Laufey, from Iceland, won best traditional pop vocal album at the Grammy Awards for *Bewitched*, which also topped *Billboard*'s Jazz Albums and Traditional Jazz Albums charts. Meanwhile, since AWAL signed Djo (the moniker of actor Joe Keery from Netflix's *Stranger Things*) in 2019, he has achieved global stardom, particularly with his breakout viral hit, "End of Beginning," which earned him his first entry

PER OLE HAGEN/REDFERNS

on the Hot 100 and landed at No. 2 on Spotify's global chart. AWAL also expanded, launching in six new markets including Mexico, Brazil and India. "More than ever," Hitchman says, AWAL "is uniquely positioned to champion entrepreneurial artists on both a local and global level."

Manu Kaushish
President of India, Create Music Group

Create Music Group, which provides artists and labels with distribution, rights management and creative services, continued to grow stateside and internationally last year. "On YouTube, India has surged to become our second-largest market by viewership, right behind the U.S.," Kaushish says. "Our new partnerships such as the TikTok Commercial Music Library have led to Canadian artist success stories, with Flight School and Amanda Frances accumulating over 500 million views of their sounds with hundreds of thousands of video creations." Create has also added to its roster of international artists with the goal of continuing to "bring chart-topping music and international collaborations to our global audiences in 2024."

Ben Larsen
Senior vp of global marketing, Warner Records

Jericho Adams
Vp of global marketing, Warner Recorded Music

Geneva Gamblin
Director of global marketing, Warner Recorded Music

Two of the past year's biggest breakouts, singer-songwriters Benson Boone and Teddy Swims, started their rise outside the United States. Warner Records launched Boone, whose "Beautiful Things" has spent eight weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart, with a "global-first, fan-first, culture-first approach," Larsen says. Similarly, Warner Records has worked with Swims for four years "to build real fan bases all over the world" for "Lose Control," which hit No. 4 on the Billboard Global 200, Larsen says. Adams, meanwhile, played a key role in the global success of Gunna's hit single "fukumean," and Gamblin helped drive the international success of Fall Out Boy's album *So Much (for) Stardust*.

Thomas Lorain
Nick Roden
Co-presidents, Virgin Music Group Europe

Victor Gonzalez
President, Virgin Music Group Latin America and Iberian Peninsula

Nathan McLay
Managing director, Virgin Music Group Australia and New Zealand

Michael Roe
Managing director, Virgin Music Group Africa, Middle East and Asia

"Over the past year, we have been focused on integrating the Virgin Music, Ingrooves and mtheory teams and strengthening our footprint around the world," Lorain says. With teams in 32 countries, the company is "aggressively growing in fast-growth markets, giving our artist and label partners the very best available expertise and solutions to create opportunities for their artists no matter where they are," he adds. Virgin Music Group's global wins range from Chicago's David Kushner and Miami's Gonzy to Nigeria's Rema, France's Zaho de Sagazan and Australia's G Flip.

Ted May
Managing director U.K./head of international for music, MNRK Music Group

May takes pride in the balance that his indie company struck across music genres over the past year, from rock legend Ace Frehley's late-career overseas success, to Gregory Alan Isakov's accolades in the folk world, to GEE LEE's dance streaming hit "Fake ID (Coke & Rum Remix)" and other tracks reaching over 100 million streams in a year, according to MNRK. "There has been no other indie nurturing acts across so many genres in so many markets globally this year," May says, while also teasing an upcoming "huge international rap crossover record" from MNRK.

Ben Mortimer
President, Polydor Records U.K.

Polydor scored numerous victories in the United Kingdom in 2023, including No. 1 albums from Olivia Rodrigo, Cian Ducrot, boygenius, Ellie Goulding and The Rolling Stones, as well as two catalog titles in the Official Charts Company's year-end top 10: Eminem's *Curtain Call: The Hits* and ABBA's *Gold*. There were also breakthroughs for rapper Clavish and Irish dance artist Jazzy, whose hit single "Giving Me" was the first release on Polydor's new electronic music imprint, Chaos. Lana Del Rey notched her sixth U.K. No. 1 album with *Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd*. "She's a true artist in every sense of the word," Mortimer says, "and there's so much more to come."

Roshi Motman
CEO, Amuse

After rising in prominence following the success of Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" in 2019, global digital distribution service Amuse remains a top player in the music industry, especially for independent artists. In 2023, Amuse enjoyed success in Sweden, where it had five of the 10 most-streamed songs on Spotify, while one of its licensed acts, Yot Club, reached 1 billion streams with "YKWIM?" "There's a monumental shift happening in the industry," Motman says, "and we're excited to support the new generation of independent stars."

Suhel Nafarr
Vp of strategy and development, EMPIRE

Ezegozie Eze Jr.
Vp of strategy and market development of Africa and Diaspora, EMPIRE

Mobolaji Kareem
Regional head of West Africa, EMPIRE

After leading the music industry to rethink how it approached distribution of rap albums and singles starting in 2016, the EMPIRE team shifted its attention to Africa. Since 2019, the distributor turned label and content powerhouse has been a major force on the continent, inking deals with Nigerian music mogul Olamide and his YBNL Nation artists, Asake and Fireboy DML. The success of that partnership has coincided with deals with Bnxn fka Buju and Ruger. And the company has already established a presence in South Africa, North Africa and West Asia in a bid to become one of the fastest-growing music companies in those regions.

Jamie Oborne
Founder/owner, Dirty Hit/All on Red

While indie label Dirty Hit has grown under Oborne's stewardship to boast such hit-makers as Bleachers and beabadoobee on its roster, its flagship act remains The 1975, which Oborne has managed for over a decade. The act, which staged its Still... At Their Very Best tour in North America and European arenas in late 2023 and early 2024, has sold nearly 2 million concert tickets, according to Oborne. The group also joined TikTok, with videos using its hashtag boasting over 4 billion combined views. "The campaign has been incredibly personally rewarding," Oborne says.

AWAL artist **Laufey**, from Iceland, won the Grammy Award for best traditional pop vocal album for *Bewitched*, which also topped *Billboard*'s Jazz Albums and Traditional Jazz Albums charts.

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Alejandra Olea
Managing director of Americas, Believe
Andreea Gleeson
CEO, TuneCore
Romain Vivien
Global head of music/president of Europe, Believe

The past year has been "incredibly exciting" for the Paris-based digital distribution company "thanks to our team's unrivaled digital expertise, passion and commitment to empowering local music scenes all around the world," Vivien says. Believe has grown both at home and abroad. The company says it had a 29% market share in France for the top albums and top singles locally, including the highest-selling French album of the year, *Carré*, by newcomer Werenoi. Another notable feat: Iñigo Quintero's viral song "Si No Estás," which peaked at No. 1 on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart in November. A consortium led by Believe founder Denis Ladegaillerie plans to take the company private in the coming year after Warner Music ended acquisition talks.

Maykel Piron
CEO, Armada Music

Armada Music crossed the 20-year mark in 2023 and remains a force in EDM. With a "strong history in creativity and innovation," Piron says, Armada launched the first dance music investment company with BEAT Music Fund. Shortly afterward, Armada bolstered its catalog globally by adding legacy acts including Dutch duo Chocolate Puma, New York-based independent dance label King Street Sounds, U.K.-based Sola Records and Viva Music. "It has been and remains a privilege to work with the kinds of people that sparked my passion for dance music in the first place," he says, "and that passion is still very much alive to this day."

Martin Price
Senior vp of global business development, ONErpm
Ahu Ozisik
Country manager of Turkey, ONErpm

ONErpm, which provides digital distribution and artist services, has had year-over-year growth of 40%, Price says, "combined with the rollout of our broader new offerings of Offstep and Enterprise Solutions and continued successful expansion into Scandinavia and the Middle East." Offstep is a digital distribution service designed for DIY artists, while Enterprise Solutions offers financial and accounting services. In Turkey, ONErpm "has seen over 150% growth from 2022 to 2023," Ozisik says, with success stories such as the Azer Bülbül Tribute project — which honors the late Turkish singer-actor — reaching over 178 million streams, according to the company.

Paul Redding
CEO, Beggars Group
Alex Keague-Davies
GM, Matador Records

"Our global structure continued to deliver success for our artists and labels," says Redding of Beggars Group, which is home to labels Matador, 4AD, Rough Trade, XL Recordings and Young. He cites Queens of the Stone Age and The National as two rock bands under its umbrella that released albums in 2023 and went on tours that delivered "unspeakably great live shows" to fans. "There were so many other successes from our artists in so many different countries," he says. "I could not be more excited about the artists on all our labels and look forward to 2024 being even better."

Jeffrey Remedios
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music Canada
Julie Adam
Executive vp/GM, Universal Music Canada
JP Boucher
Senior vp of marketing, Universal Music Canada

Under Remedios' leadership, Universal Music Canada has been the driving force behind award-winning, record-breaking artist projects, initiatives and campaigns over the past 12 months. "The results speak for themselves," he says. "In Canada in 2023, eight of the top 10 albums overall were by Universal Music artists, and Universal had the No. 1 album 33 of 52 weeks of the year. Canadian artists Josh Ross, Jamie Fine and Preston Pablo continued to break records in Canada and chart internationally, and we're expanding our epic roster by signing new deals with powerhouse artists."

Ruben Santos
Vp of A&R for Cinq Music Latin America, Cinq Music

In 2023, Santos played a pivotal role in driving Cinq Music's mission to promote Latin artists worldwide. He notes that singles from Haze and Jhayco, Calle 24 and Chino Pacas, and Fuerza Regida, as well as the release of Tito Torbellino Jr's album *Torbellino* and other Cinq projects, helped "fuel the Latin landscape to unprecedented heights," amassing approximately 500 million streams in total last year, according to the company. "With strategic vision, an innovative approach to artist collaboration and a curated roster of mega hit-makers across genres from reggaetón to regional Mexican," he says, "I feel proud that my contributions have set the stage for continued cultural richness and the global appeal of Latin American music."

Adriana Sein
Head of global artist and market development, ADA Worldwide
Howard Corner
Managing director, ADA U.K.
Alassane Konate
Managing director, ADA France
Ben Ralph
Senior vp, ADA Australasia
Cesar Lores
Director, ADA Iberia

ADA has logged multiple successes over the last year, including Spanish artist Quevedo's debut album, *Donde Quiero Estar*, which generated over 3 billion streams and debuted at No. 12 on Top Latin Albums. Sonny Fodera's gold-certified "Asking" was the first single in a decade from an artist-owned dance label to enter the U.K. top 10. Other notable ADA achievements: Kerser scored the highest-selling first-week numbers for an Australian artist with *A Gift & A Kers*, and Hamza's *Sincèrement* reached No. 1 in France. Sein was instrumental in securing a global distribution deal for U.S.-based Rostrum Records, founded by CEO Benjy Grinberg. One of the world's leading independent labels, Rostrum launched the careers of Wiz Khalifa and the late Mac Miller.

Wassim "SAL" Slaiby
Founder/CEO, SALXCO/XO, Universal Music Arabic

Slaiby knows a star when he sees one. The Weeknd's longtime manager, through his company SALXCO, has been involved in the careers of multiple chart-topping musicians — from Brandy to Bryson Tiller to French Montana. He has been helping to push Middle Eastern music to the forefront in the United States with artists like Mohamed Ramadan and Elyanna. "Witnessing Elyanna's historic performance at Coachella [in 2023], where she became the first artist to captivate the audience with a set in Arabic, and subsequently selling out her North American tour at such a young age has been so special," he says.

Quevedo's debut album, *Donde Quiero Estar*, has generated over 3 billion streams worldwide, according to ADA.

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Marcelo Soares

President, Som Livre

Soares is beyond proud of what Brazilian record company Som Livre achieved last year. "It commanded the top positions of the Brazilian charts in 2023 with five of the top seven songs in the country, and 'Leão' by the late Marília Mendonça leading the way," he says. At last year's Latin Grammy Awards, held in Seville, Spain, the label's talent received four of the nine nominations in the Portuguese-language categories including best Portuguese language rock or alternative album, best Portuguese language urban performance, best Portuguese language song and best sertanejo music album.

Kieran Thurgood

Senior vp of global marketing, Capitol Music Group

Thurgood points to Doechii and her breakout hit, "What It Is" (featuring Kodak Black), as a global success story for Capitol. The song "sparked out of Nigeria and the Philippines, which in turn created a hit in the U.S., with the song recently topping U.S. charts," he says. The single reached No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Rhythmic Airplay chart in June. And while he adds that Ice Spice "has been a key global focus" for the label, he promises an "even bigger 2024" for the fast-rising superstar. "It's a hugely exciting time for Capitol," he says. "The building is just buzzing."

Chloé van Bergen

Vp of operations for U.K. and Europe, Secretly Group

Chris Cannon

Head of international strategy, Secretly Distribution

Tom Davies

Director of global marketing and campaigns, Secretly Distribution

With new offices in Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam and Sydney, the Secretly Group of labels and Secretly Distribution enjoyed international growth in 2023. Notably, Secretly Group celebrated the viral success of Mitski's "My Love Mine All Mine," which entered the top 30 of the Hot 100 and ruled the TikTok Billboard Top 50 for six weeks. Secretly Distribution added new label clients (including Chrysalis Records and Moshi Moshi Records), with van Bergen citing "hugely successful campaigns it oversaw, such as Sufjan Stevens' acclaimed *Javelin* [Asthmatic Kitty], El Michels Affair & Black Thought [Big Crown], Say She She [Colemine Records] and label services client campaigns such as A24, Reverend Kristin Michael Hayter, Beirut and many more."

Dan Waite

CEO, Better Noise Music

In a year where he moved from president to CEO of hard rock-focused label Better Noise Music, Waite has also been involved in discussions about royalty changes with Spotify and Apple Music in his role as chair of the indie-supporting IMPALA Digital Committee, "representing concerns and questions from the IMPALA members across Europe." With Better Noise, he has enjoyed another successful year for acts like longtime rock hit-makers Five Finger Death Punch, including a tour supporting Metallica and a No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Mainstream Rock Airplay chart with "Welcome to the Circus" — the band's record-extending 10th consecutive No. 1 on the chart.

ASSOCIATIONS

Manuel Abud

CEO, Latin Recording Academy

Global expansion and diversification have been the core goals of the Latin Recording Academy over the past year. For the first time, not only were the Latin Grammy Awards held abroad, in Seville, Spain, but also featured 100% female representation in the four main categories — and Laura Pausini was honored as the 2023 person of the year. As part of its international expansion plan, the academy also pursued opportunities in Mexico, Brazil and Spain outside of awards season. "I am very proud to continue leading my team with the support of our board of trustees," Abud says, "and look forward to continue building on this momentum of our evolution in the year ahead."

Charlie Lexton

COO, Merlin

Merlin, which represents 15% of the global recorded-music market, has spent the past year developing what Lexton calls a "data warehouse" to analyze its trove of streaming, video and social media metrics. "This sophisticated platform facilitates comprehensive analysis to deliver deep insights," says Lexton (who was promoted to COO in 2020), at a time when Merlin had spent the previous 12 years distributing some $4 billion to its more than 500 members. Lexton's team has also hired data, analytics, finance and software employees who are "focused on furnishing the organization's members with unique, exclusive and actionable insights."

John Nolan

CFO/interim joint head, IFPI

Lauri Rechardt

Chief legal officer/interim joint head, IFPI

Following last year's retirement of longtime CEO Frances Moore, two members of IFPI's executive team, Nolan and Rechardt, were appointed by its global board to co-manage the organization as it searched for its next leader. (Victoria Oakley will

UMPG'S ALEXANDRA LIOUTIKOFF WINS INAUGURAL BILLBOARD INTERNATIONAL POWER PLAYERS' CHOICE AWARD

Lioutikoff (left) and Monte

Billboard Pro members have selected Universal Music Publishing Group (UMPG) president of Latin America and U.S. Latin Alexandra Lioutikoff as the first recipient of the International Power Players' Choice Award. The peer-voted award honors the global executive who Billboard Pro members believe had the most impact across the business in the past year.

Being the first to accomplish something monumental is nothing new for Lioutikoff. In 2019, she was named the first female president of Latin America and U.S. Latin for a major music publishing company, where she now oversees operations for nearly 20 countries.

Under Lioutikoff, UMPG Latin has been named publisher of the year by both BMI and ASCAP. Individually, she has been honored by the Latin Songwriters Hall of Fame and received the T.J. Martell Foundation's Estefan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Throughout her tenure at UMPG, Lioutikoff has focused on integrating the Latin roster into the mainstream and global music market and led UMPG to become the leading Latin music publisher with a roster of songwriters, producers and publishers including Bad Bunny, Rosalía, J Balvin, Marisa Monte, Romeo Santos, Feid, Sebastián Yatra, Eladio Carrión, Luísa Sonza and the estate of Jenni Rivera.

"I'm truly grateful for this recognition," Lioutikoff says. "UMPG is proud to be at the forefront of global music, especially Latin, which has cemented its place in the landscape. We have long understood that all music is world music, regardless of language or geography, and it's great to see diverse songs, cultures and tastes be embraced everywhere."

> "UMPG is proud to be at the forefront of global music, especially Latin, which has cemented its place in the landscape."
>
> —LIOUTIKOFF

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assume the CEO role on June 1.) As CFO, Nolan is responsible for IFPI's global revenue data for the recorded-music industry, global charts and management of the organization's operational and financial support functions. Rechardt's experience includes previous roles as deputy general counsel and director of licensing and litigation at IFPI, partner and head of intellectual property at a leading Finnish law firm and head of the IFPI Finnish national group.

John Phelan
Director general, International Confederation of Music Publishers

Phelan's team helped "bag serious wins in incoming AI laws for the music industry and our songwriter and composer partners," he says, citing the European Union AI Act, which European Parliament passed March 13 after negotiations throughout 2023. According to the ICMP, the act forces AI companies to "observe EU copyright law," stop "illegally taking the world's music to train AI models" and "retain detailed documentation on what content was used to train the model." The law, Phelan adds, "will be a force multiplier for copyright protection in AI around the world, [which] matters for every last music company and creator."

PUBLISHING

Annette Barrett
Managing director/global strategic liaison, Reservoir; president, International Music Publishers Forum

Jeremy Lascelles
Co-founder/CEO, Blue Raincoat Music; CEO, Chrysalis Records

Hussain "Spek" Yoosuf
Executive vp of international and emerging markets, Reservoir; founder/CEO, PopArabia

In the past year, Reservoir's global offices have executed strategic deals through its venture with PopArabia, such as signing "Queen of Pop" Nancy Ajram and continuing to develop PopArabia's rights organization, ESMAA. The first-of-its-kind music rights management entity looks to protect artists and music creators throughout the United Arab Emirates and the Persian Gulf. One of its major accomplishments includes creating the first licensing platform for music publishers and performing rights organizations in the Middle East and North Africa. "It is an honor," Yoosuf says, "to be recognized alongside my colleagues Jeremy Lascelles and Annette Barrett out of the U.K."

Ben Budde
CEO, Budde Group

Budde is the third-generation CEO of the Berlin-based, family-owned music publisher, which ranks fifth in Germany by market share behind the majors and BMG. Over the past decade, he has expanded the company into talent management, concert promotion and a co-owned agency business that represents film/TV clients, as well as musicians. One big 2023 highlight: a Grammy nomination for the joint-venture tribute album *I Am a Pilgrim: Doc Watson at 100*, which featured contributions from Dolly Parton, Rosanne Cash and others. Budde Talent Agency is becoming a major player in Europe, and Budde has global ambitions. "I want international success stories for our writers," he says. "Global hits."

Kobalt has a publishing interest in **Tyla**'s "Water," a No. 1 hit on *Billboard*'s Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart.

Catrin Drabble
CFO, Kobalt

Rob Christensen
Executive vp/head of global synch, Kobalt

Jon Trumbull
Global head of client services and administration, Kobalt

Leslie Ahrens
Senior vp of creative for Latin America, Kobalt

Kenny McGoff
Head of creative U.K., Kobalt

"Collectively, the Kobalt team has been behind some of the most important artists of the last 12 months," McGoff says. He hails Billboard Women in Music 2024 Woman of the Year Karol G, "who continues to break new ground." Her 2023 album, *Mañana Será Bonito*, became the first all-Spanish-language album by a female artist to top the Billboard 200 and earned the Latin pop star her first Grammy Award in February. He also cites "topliner Mocha" (Imani Lewis), who co-wrote Tyla's global smash and Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart No. 1, "Water," and The Last Dinner Party, "one of the most exciting new bands in the world."

Kim Frankiewicz
Executive vp of worldwide A&R, Concord Music Publishing

Tina Funk
Managing director, Concord Music Publishing Germany, Switzerland and Austria

Jaime Gough
Managing director, Concord Australia and New Zealand

Concord's recent successes include such newly minted Grammy winners as South African star Tyla, whose "Water" won best African music performance, and U.K. grime MC-producer Flowdan, whose "Rumble," a collaboration with Skrillex and Fred again.., won best dance/electronic recording. Concord has also achieved success with Berlin-based songwriter Kristine Bogan, who co-wrote K-pop girl group NewJeans' hit "Super Shy," a track from the act's Billboard 200-topping EP, *Get Up*. "Our songwriters from across the roster and around the globe had an incredible year with breakthrough hits," Frankiewicz says. "All this success comes from our creative team and the global network we've built."

Shani Gonzales
Managing director, Warner Chappell Music U.K.; head of international A&R, Warner Chappell Music

Natascha Augustin
Managing director, Warner Chappell Music Germany

Lars Karlsson
Managing director, Warner Chappell Music Scandinavia

Gustavo Menéndez
President, U.S. Latin and Latin America, Warner Chappell Music

Santiago Menéndez-Pidal
President, Warner Chappell Music Southern Europe

Matthieu Tessier
Managing director, Warner Chappell Music France

In the United Kingdom, Gonzales oversaw Warner Chappell Music writer Dave teaming up with Central Cee for the 2023 single "Sprinter," which became the longest-reigning U.K. rap single in U.K. chart history. According to the Official Charts Company, Warner Chappell Music Germany achieved a 27.8% market share in 2023, in part thanks to Augustin's embrace of German-language hip-hop. Under Karlsson, Warner Chappell writer Loreen won Sweden's Melodifestivalen contest with "Tattoo," which she then took to the Eurovision Song Contest. At the Latin Grammy Awards, held in Spain last year, Menéndez celebrated the person of the year honor going to Italian-born Warner Chappell writer-performer Laura Pausini, the first artist born outside of Latin America or Spain to receive the recognition.

David Gray
Executive vp/head of U.S. A&R/head of global creative group, Universal Music Publishing Group

Alexandra Lioutikoff
President of Latin America and U.S. Latin, Universal Music Publishing Group

Yadira Moreno
Managing director of Mexico and Central America, Universal Music Publishing Group

Ana Rosa Santiago
Senior vp of Latin America and U.S. Latin, Universal Music Publishing Group

More than ever, the team at UMPG is leveraging its network of offices around the world to provide its writers with new opportunities. "[We] think globally, act locally," Lioutikoff says. "UMPG first looks at UMPG artists and writers in their original market and then ideates how to leverage the writing talents available from other various territories to create worldwide opportunities." These international opportunities for writers are often spearheaded

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by UMPG's Global Creative Group, a worldwide team of A&R executives and creatives. Its successes this year included forming the unlikely pairing of Mexican artist-writer Carín León and its Nashville writers and encouraging the collaboration between Brazil's Luísa Sonza and Demi Lovato on "Penhasco 2," a No. 4 hit on the Billboard Brazil Hot 100.

Josh Gruss
CEO, Round Hill Music

The sale of the London Stock Exchange-listed Round Hill Music Royalty Fund portfolio to Concord was a "standout transaction," Gruss says, as it featured 10 years' worth of a carefully curated collection of rights. It also demonstrated the value of "timeless, well-managed music and ensured a second successful exit event for our investors, following the 2020 [initial public offering] of the portfolio that we originally launched back in 2012," he says.

Guy Henderson
President of international, Sony Music Publishing

David Ventura
President/co-managing director of U.K./senior vp of international, Sony Music Publishing

Tim Major
Co-managing director of U.K., Sony Music Publishing

Nicolas Galibert
Managing director of France, Sony Music Publishing

Jorge Mejia
President/CEO of Latin America and U.S. Latin, Sony Music Publishing

The publisher scored a global smash with Rema and Selena Gomez's No. 3 Billboard Global 200 hit, "Calm Down," produced by Michael "London" Hunter; landed numerous Latin chart-toppers, including Shakira and Karol G's "TQG," co-written by Keityn; and paired Dan Smith of Bastille with composer Hans Zimmer on the score to the BBC's *Planet Earth III*. "We are very intentional about nurturing meaningful connections with our songwriters so that we can help them to realize their creative ambitions," Major says. Ventura notes working with Sony's Social Justice Fund and SMP's Songwriters Forward initiative, which "continues to make an impact on the next generation of talent."

David Loiterton
President of Indo and Asia Pacific, Primary Wave Music

Loiterton highlights last year's investment in Indian label/music publisher Times Music — part of the Times of India media conglomerate — as part of Primary Wave's effort to invest in emerging markets, which he notes "will be the growth engine for the business over the next decade." The deal marked the company's "first strategic partnership in emerging markets," he adds, and "recognizes the growth of non-English-language music in markets like the U.S."

Merck Mercuriadis
Founder/chairman, Hipgnosis Song Management

Mercuriadis and the Hipgnosis team have had an indelible impact on the catalog market since the company's inception. Now Mercuriadis, who recently stepped down as Hipgnosis' CEO but remains its chairman, has $2 billion in assets under management, including parts of catalogs from Justin Bieber, Shakira, David Foster, Tobias Jesso Jr., Erika Ender and TMS in the last few years. Since 2023, Hipgnosis has handled $400 million in acquisitions that includes more than 50 No. 1 hits from Taylor Swift, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé, according to the company. Hipgnosis Songs Management is the investment adviser to Hipgnosis Songs Fund, whose board in April received competing takeover bids from Concord and Blackstone.

Mary Megan Peer
CEO, peermusic

Spencer Lee
President of Asia Pacific, peermusic

In October, peermusic opened its 39th office, making it one of the most international independent publishers in the world. As part of the new deal, peermusic also acquired Arctic Rights Management's catalog of over 5,000 recordings and compositions, including publishing interest in hits like "Don't Start Now" and "New Rules" by Dua Lipa. It has become a top choice for rights holders, including Hipgnosis and Concord, that need robust international administration services. Plus, its 2016 acquisition of MusicCube has made peermusic a major player in K-pop. "South Korea is the third-largest country in peermusic's global network on an income basis," Peer says, citing hits recorded by acts such as NewJeans, G(I)-DLE and Le Sserafim that have contributed most to the company's 17% compound annual growth rate in the Asia Pacific region.

Emily Stephenson
President, Downtown Music Publishing

Thando Makhunga
Managing director, Sheer Publishing Africa

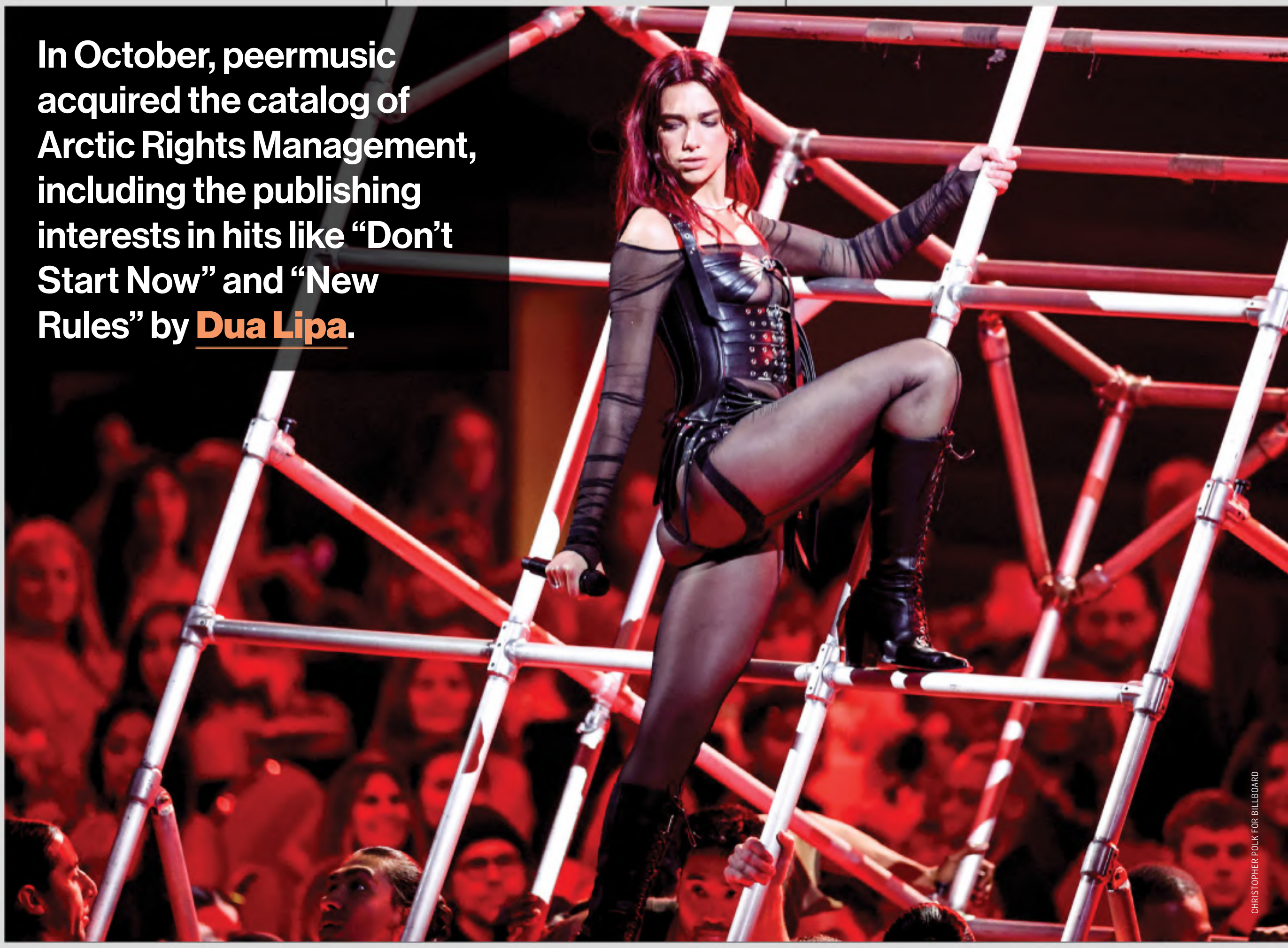
Scoring new deals with artists like Peso Pluma and Colbie Caillat, Downtown Music Publishing had "unprecedented growth" throughout 2023, Stephenson says. Downtown also represented 11 global songwriters who took home Grammy Awards in 2024, including best traditional pop vocal album and best tropical Latin album. The company helped place Bruce Hornsby's "The Show Goes On" in the season premiere of FX's Emmy Award-winning TV series *The Bear* and secured a new administrative services deal with publisher Spirit Music Group. Stephenson attributes Downtown's blockbuster year to its "unwavering commitment to serving emerging, independent artists around the world."

LIVE

Dion Brant
CEO, Frontier Touring

Susan Heymann
COO, Frontier Touring

Frontier Touring set about smashing records in 2023 with over 600 shows across Australia; more than 40 of those were in stadiums, including Ed Sheeran's +-=÷x Tour. Equally impressive, Brant says, are the more than 20 new acts broken in that time as touring headliners. "Our approach is different from other promoters," he says. "Our priorities are the artist, the fans and the show, ahead of the net profit or the quarterly market update." That success continued in early 2024 with Taylor Swift's sold-out, seven-date Australian stadium run for her The Eras Tour, produced by Frontier.



In October, peermusic acquired the catalog of Arctic Rights Management, including the publishing interests in hits like "Don't Start Now" and "New Rules" by Dua Lipa.

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Carolina Daza

Head of live entertainment, Cárdenas Marketing Network

Luis Miguel's world tour kicked off in August with a run of 20 arena shows between Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Santiago, Chile. According to Billboard Boxscore, the concerts in Buenos Aires brought in $13.9 million from 105,000 tickets, while the other 10 in Santiago raked in $14.3 million from 122,000 tickets. Following a robust stint in South America, Luis Miguel filled arenas in the United States and finished the year in Mexico. Overall, the sold-out tour, produced by CMN in partnership with Fenix Entertainment, made 66 stops, and the Mexican crooner is set to continue his trek this year with over 100 shows scheduled.

Denis Desmond

Chairman, Live Nation U.K. and Ireland

John Reid

President, Live Nation Europe, the Middle East and Africa

Marek Lieberberg

CEO/managing director, Live Nation Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Andre Lieberberg

President/managing director, Live Nation Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Mark Kneebone

Vp of talent, Live Nation Australasia; managing director, Live Nation New Zealand

Wenona Lok

Promoter, Live Nation Australasia

Under Desmond, Live Nation U.K. and Ireland had a record year in 2023 with 16 million tickets sold, including stadium shows by Beyoncé, Blur, Harry Styles, The Weeknd and AEW Wrestling, according to the company. Father and son Marek and Andre Lieberberg led Live Nation's acquisition of Goodhive, which presents 10 festivals across Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Live Nation promoted 71 arena dates in the region by German schlager singer Helene Fischer, one of the biggest arena concerts in Germany's history in the number of shows, according to Live Nation. Kneebone, with help from Lok, oversaw TWICE becoming the first female group to headline a stadium in Australia and the first K-pop act to play such a venue with its two shows in November at Marvel Stadium in Melbourne.

Pascual Egea

Head of Europe, WK Entertainment

César Figueiredo

Artist manager, WK Entertainment/Central Sonora

"Central Sonora has proven to be a powerhouse among Brazil's exclusive artist management companies," Figueiredo says. "Its partnership with WK Entertainment has been instrumental in making strides to foster creativity and diversity in the global music landscape." The artist manager's top acts include Brazilian superstar Ludmilla, who was named *Billboard*'s Latin Artist on the Rise in February 2023. Her accolades include winning best Latin collaboration at the LOS40 Music Awards in 2023 and, more recently, "accumulating more than 5 million streams in less than 24 hours" with album *Numanice #3*, Figueiredo adds. The Rio de Janeiro native performed at this year's Coachella festival.

Kaori Hayashi

CEO, Hayashi International Promotions

Hayashi says that "without a doubt" her company's greatest achievement over the past year was promoting seven sold-out Bruno Mars stadium shows at the Tokyo Dome, which she says broke all records for Japanese box-office receipts and confirmed "that Bruno is the No. 1 international artist in Japan." Hayashi runs the company founded by her father, Hiromichi "Massy" Hayashi, and was recognized last fall in Billboard Japan's Women in Music interview series. "There aren't many female concert promoters out there," she says, "so I'd be happy if people notice me for being the next generation of the business and for being a rare woman in it who can really help shake up the industry."

Alex Hill

President/CEO, AEG Europe

Adam Wilkes

Chairman/CEO, AEG Asia Pacific; chairman of the board, Frontier Touring

Steve Homer

CEO, AEG Presents U.K.

Jim King

CEO of European festivals, AEG Presents

John Langford

COO, AEG Europe

Simon Jones

Senior vp of international touring, AEG Presents

For AEG Europe, Hill oversees venues, tours and festivals including BST Hyde Park in London, which in 2023 welcomed P!nk, Blackpink, Guns N' Roses, Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band, Take That, Lana Del Rey and Billy Joel. Wilkes expanded his role in Asia to take on the position of chairman of the board of AEG partner Frontier Touring. In the United Kingdom, Homer led the multimillion-dollar renovation of The Halls Wolverhampton, reviving the historic music venue. Langford is responsible for all arena operations across the United Kingdom and Germany, including O2 Arena in London, the Mercedes-Benz Arena in Berlin and Barclays Arena in Hamburg, Germany. Jones guides AEG tours outside North America, including Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour.

Joe Howard

Global festival promoter, C3 Presents

Huston Powell

Promoter, C3 Presents

Global impact is a C3 Presents hallmark, as Lollapalooza consistently showcases robust lineups of local and regional talent along with major global touring acts. Howard has observed an uptick in international artists playing higher positions on festival bills, "from Stray Kids headlining Lolla Paris last summer to the significant slots for Karol G, Tomorrow X Together and NewJeans performing at Lolla Chicago, and The Rose playing five different Lollapalooza festivals in the last year between South America, Chicago, Berlin in 2023 and, most recently, in Mumbai [India] this past January." Colombian artist Feid's headlining turns at Lolla Chile and Argentina in March provided another highlight.

Blaine Legere

President of international, AXS

The AEG-owned ticketing platform launched AXS New Zealand and AXS Australia with a mix of venue, sports and music clients. Two subsequent high points for the company included the Foo Fighters' Christchurch gig at Orangetheory Stadium and Paramore's record-breaking performance at The Domain in Sydney. In Japan, AXS tripled the size of its tech and support teams in running the Valorant Riot Games Championship in Tokyo and supporting World Baseball Classic events in Tokyo and Osaka. "Our presence in [Asia Pacific]," Legere says, "was a key component of AXS winning" the ticketing services deal for the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

Peter Loxton

COO of commercial, ASM Global

ASM Global's presence in the Middle East has grown with the addition of new venues within Expo City Dubai, which hosted COP28 alongside the Coca-Cola

WME client **Bruno Mars** played seven sold-out shows in 2023 at the Toyko Dome, presented by Hayashi International Promotions.

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CEO, peermusic
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Arena in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Loxton is also excited about partnerships in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, as well as ventures in East Asia. "This year, the finishing touches are being made to the massive Pearl of the Orient, Kai Tak Sports Park, in Hong Kong," he says, "and we continue to collaborate on Brisbane Live Arena, which will enhance the entertainment legacy of the city, both for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the future."

Klaus-Peter Schulenberg
CEO, CTS Eventim

Europe's largest ticketing company, CTS Events, enjoyed a second record-breaking year in revenue and profitability with an international expansion that includes the acquisitions, in partnership with Sony Music Latin-Iberia, of Punto Ticket in Chile and Teleticket in Peru. Besides successfully handling the sales for highly anticipated tours such as Taylor Swift, AC/DC and Rammstein, the company was appointed as one of two ticketers for the LA28 Olympic and Paralympic Games alongside AEG's AXS. "These key endeavors underscore our dedication to worldwide growth," Schulenberg says, "and strengthen CTS Eventim's position in global live entertainment."

Alejandro Soberón Kuri
Founder/CEO, OCESA
Octavio Padilla
Director, OCESA Seitrack
Leizer Guss Guss
Festivals director, OCESA

In 2023, Soberón Kuri says, OCESA "connected the best artists and bands on the planet with an amazing audience, based on creativity, experience and knowledge." Majority-owned by Live Nation since 2021, the Mexico City-based concert promoter brought fans international superstars like Taylor Swift, Paul McCartney, Lana Del Rey, The Weeknd, Billie Eilish, Post Malone, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rauw Alejandro, Imagine Dragons, Mötley Crüe/Def Leppard and Peso Pluma. "Jointly with Live Nation," Soberón Kuri says, "we will continue to be one of the most prominent cities in the artistic circuit in the world for artists, promoters and music producers to showcase their talent and connect with the best audiences."

AGENCIES

Sia Aghaiepour
Founder/CEO, Heavy Rotation

The booking agency Heavy Rotation "has been making waves in the Middle East," Aghaiepour says, "orchestrating over 70 blockbuster shows featuring superstars like Chris Brown, Davido, Rema, Asake and many more." Strategic partnerships with Live Nation Middle East and Coca-Cola Arena in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, have "propelled us to new heights," Aghaiepour says, crediting his "squad for their resilience and ingenuity in shaping the future of global entertainment."

Ticketing company CTS Eventim sold seats for tours by top artists including veteran German band Rammstein.

Emma Banks
Mike Greek
Co-heads of international touring/ co-heads of London office, CAA
Chris Dalston
Marlene Tsuchii
Co-heads of international touring, CAA
Andy Cook
Music agent, CAA

CAA clients including Harry Styles, Beyoncé, The Weeknd, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Muse and Westlife sold out stadium tours throughout Europe, Asia, South America and Australia, while Lana Del Rey, blink-182, Hozier and Noah Kahan embarked on sold-out global outdoor and arena runs, with "even bigger shows ahead in 2024," Cook says. He also cites the "staggering success" of AC/DC's forthcoming Power Up tour, the band's first European tour in eight years, which Cook says sold 1.5 million tickets internationally the day it went on sale.

Matt Bates
CEO/agent, Primary Talent International
Rick Levy
Partner/board member, Primary Talent International

After announcing a surprise split with CAA in March 2023 — less than a year after CAA acquired Primary Talent through its purchase of Primary's parent company, ICM Presents — the U.K. booking agency has continued to grow as a "reestablished independent," Bates says. Since the decoupling, according to the agency, it has booked over 6,000 shows internationally — and sold 400,000 headline tickets for The 1975 in the United Kingdom alone. Last April, the company also welcomed former ICM agent Pete Nash as a partner, gaining his clients including Kings of Leon, Pet Shop Boys, Regina Spektor, Steve Winwood and Travis.

Jeff Craib
CEO, The Feldman Agency
Rob Segal
President of TFA brands and partnerships, The Feldman Agency

"Over the past year at TFA, my biggest achievement has been shepherding the new business in owned and operated properties," Segal says, "like Montreal Grand Prix, now expanding to Miami; launching the first season of The Bowl, Toronto's new outdoor concert venue; and spearheading licensing and branding opportunities for our roster of talented artists." The agency, which has a long-term strategy that includes verticals besides representing its touring artists, boasts a roster that features Shania Twain, Avril Lavigne, Sum 41, Simple Plan, Barenaked Ladies, Alvvays, Feist, Alessia Cara and Nelly Furtado.

Lucy Dickins
Partner/global head of contemporary music and touring, WME
Josh Javor
Partner/co-head of London music department, WME
James Rubin
Partner/co-head of hip-hop/R&B, WME
Brett Murrihy
Partner/head of music Asia Pacific, WME
Shannon Saunders
Agent, WME

Teams in Latin America, Europe and the Asia Pacific region have made WME "the only major music booking agency with multiple regional servicing groups," Dickins says. This reach made it possible to book "a wide range of truly global tours this year" with runs including a 214-show Backstreet Boys outing that visited six continents and, Dickins says, sold over 2 million tickets. Usher held a residency in Paris; Luis Miguel launched a 121-show tour in North, South and Central America; Bruno Mars played seven sold-out shows at Japan's Tokyo Dome; Zach Bryan played his first European headlining shows; and J Balvin played his first headline dates in Australia. Adele's upcoming residency in Munich will also mark the first time an artist has had a stadium purposely built for a show.

Ulises Gasparini
General director of GTS Brazil, Global Talent Services
Gaby Gómez
Director of GTS Live Mexico, Global Talent Services
Mari Cruz Laguna Santos
GTS Live director/corporate representative, Global Talent Services

In the past year, Global Talent Services,

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Colombian band **Morat** sold out 1 million tickets across 125 concerts in 15 countries with its *Si Ayer Fuera Hoy* tour, according to Global Talent Services.

a division of Universal Music Group, has positioned itself as a top-level agency for management in Spain with 24 acts on its roster, in addition to its live-events division selling out over 500 shows in 2023. In Mexico, GTS sold 175 shows among 25 artists and, in Brazil, serves as the booking agency and managing partner for acts such as Maneva, Leo Santana, Atitude 67, Felipe Araújo and Paula Fernandes. One of the company's notable highlights, according to Cruz Laguna Santos, is "the positioning of Colombian band Morat as the No. 1 Spanish-speaking pop-rock act of the moment." The band sold out 1 million tickets across 125 concerts in 15 countries for its *Si Ayer Fuera Hoy* tour, according to GTS.

Hady Hajjar
Co-founder/managing director, HuManagement

Representing clients and celebrities from the Middle East and North Africa, HuManagement has had significant growth in the last year through its talent representation business and celebrity marketing work. "Our strategic partnership with Warner Music further solidifies our world position, enabling us to amplify local talent, global superstars and world-class events to the region including F1, Joy Awards and the Red Sea International Film Festival," Hajjar says. "With the entertainment market expected to grow in the region 9.41% by 2029, we're excited to be a part of shaping the future of film, music, sports and cultural events."

Keith Naisbitt
Executive vp of global touring, Independent Artist Group

Peter Pappalardo
Executive vp/head of global touring, Independent Artist Group

Pappalardo calls 50 Cent's Final Lap European tour a highlight last year for the company, which was created from the merger of the Agency for the Performing Arts and Artist Group International in June. He says the 50 Cent run boasted a "near 100% sellout rate," including more than 30,000 tickets sold in Paris and the "fastest sellout" in the history of Riga, Latvia. The tour, which was originally scheduled for 25 shows, garnered such "overwhelming demand," he adds, that the number of dates swelled to 38 across the continent.

Jon Ollier
CEO, One Fiinix Live

The Australian booking agency, management firm and digital marketing agency One Fiinix Live experienced "impressive growth" in 2023, according to Ollier, who adds, "We have developed a brand we are incredibly proud of, and we now have agents in both the U.S. and international markets." Besides bringing tour shows to clubs, theaters, arenas and stadiums, the company has helped post record-breaking runs in Australia and Asia with Ed Sheeran. "It is my belief," Ollier says, "that we are positioned to become the leading independent agency."

Brent Smith
Executive vp/managing executive, Wasserman Music

Tom Schroeder
Executive vp/managing executive, Wasserman Music (U.K.)

Jesse Fayne
Vp of international festivals, Wasserman Music

Anna Bewers
Ryan Penty
Agents, Wasserman Music (U.K.)

The agency continued representing major stars including SZA, Nothing but Thieves and Fred again.. along with "many of the most promising new artists around the world," Schroeder says. He says the essential element driving Wasserman Music's international growth has been "fostering innovation and integration across all the services we provide globally," from talent booking, brand partnerships and artist marketing to "cross-pollinating all aspects of entertainment, sports and culture." But, he says, it's the company's "core characteristics — passion, creativity, authenticity, industriousness — that have set us apart and always will."

Neil Warnock
Co-head of UTA U.K./head of global touring, UTA

Obi Asika
Co-head of UTA U.K., UTA

Anna Gregorek
Senior director of music brand partnerships and strategic marketing, UTA

Carlos Abreu
Agent, music, UTA

James Gartshore Boulter
Agent, endorsements and voiceover, UTA

Abreu cites "a record-breaking year, which wouldn't have become a reality without the hard work of every single skilled agent and colleague across our offices globally." Highlights include Rosalía performing for 160,000 people at Mexico City's Zocalo, Karol G's sold-out Latin American stadium tour and upcoming sold-out European tour, Bring Me the Horizon's headlining European festival run, Paramore's sold-out Latin American tour, Post Malone's headlining set at the inaugural edition of São Paulo's The Town festival and Burna Boy and Wizkid's debut London stadium shows. "Our international team," Abreu says, "impacted global culture in an incredible way."

RIGHTS GROUPS

Honorees in this sector were chosen solely by Billboard's editorial team and not through industry nominations.

Casper Bjørner
CEO, STIM

The Swedish collective management organization (CMO) celebrated its 100th anniversary last year and collected a record 2.7 billion krona ($267.3 million) in 2022, a 25.6% increase over 2021. According to STIM, it will set another record with its 2023 results, partly thanks to processing and licensing hub ICE, which it runs as a joint venture with PRS for Music and GEMA. "Sweden is once again punching above its weight as one of only three net music exporters in the world," Bjørner says, referring to nations whose repertoire sells outside of its borders. "Laser focused on transparent and fast payments to our members, we are all set for another century of great music-making."

Tobias Holtzmüller
CEO, GEMA

Last June, Holtzmüller was named CEO of GEMA, the German CMO, where he previously ran the legal department. He officially took on his new role on Oct. 1. In early April, GEMA announced that in 2023, it took in 1.3 billion euros ($1.4 billion), an 8.4% increase over 2022, and that for the second year in a row, it distributed over 1 billion euros ($1.1 billion) to its members. GEMA is part of the joint venture ICE, and "building an international presence is one of our priorities," Holtzmüller says.

DANIEL KNIGHT/GETTY IMAGES

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Peter Leathem

CEO, PPL

According to PPL, the U.K. performance society that collects neighboring rights royalties for artists and labels, total revenue grew yet again in 2023, while payouts in 2022 increased by 14.3% to 279.6 million pounds ($350.6 million) from 244.7 million pounds ($306.9 million) in 2022. PPL continues "to grow the value of the global neighboring rights market through supporting the development of the rights landscape outside of Europe," Leathem says, "including landing a new deal for performers in India and engaging with policymakers in China and Japan to further open up public performance licensing."

Andrea Czapary Martin

CEO, PRS for Music

In 2022, U.K. rights collection organization PRS for Music collected a record high 964 million pounds ($1.2 billion), a 22.9% increase over 2021, and cut its cost ratio to a new low of 9.3% — a major focus for Martin. PRS also accomplished "the migration of our distribution systems to the Oracle cloud, the first CMO to do so," Martin says. That "has accelerated our ability to process even more data so we can pay out more royalties, more accurately and more quickly."

Gadi Oron

Director general, CISAC

CISAC is the Paris-based trade organization of CMOs worldwide, and a flood of new content and the advent of AI are making it more important than ever. One of Oron's big 2023 wins was continuing to modernize and increase the adoption of the International Standard Musical Work Code system, which identifies compositions to help royalties flow smoothly. "In our technology work, we support increasing demands for speed and accuracy in data exchanges," Oron says. CISAC also plays a leading role in shaping AI regulation worldwide, including lobbying for the European Union AI Act that passed in March. "We see ourselves," Oron says, "as the guardian of human creators and human creativity."

Cristina Perpiñá-Robert

CEO, SGAE

Perpiñá-Robert took the top job at SGAE in April 2023 in time for the organization's 125th anniversary this year. She is in the process of restoring SGAE's reputation after some troubled years, and the organization collected 349 million euros ($367 million) in 2022, an increase of 35% over the previous year. In May, the organization will announce that its distributions will rise almost 12%. Perpiñá-Robert is also making SGAE more of a hub for Latin music, representing 16 societies for Pan-European online collection. "We added Argentina in late 2023 and Chile a few months before," she says. "And our biggest composers make really young, urban music." She also helped organize an important AI conference in March, with an event on collective management to follow in June.

Cécile Rap-Veber

CEO, SACEM

In 2022, the French CMO collected 1.4 billion euros ($1.5 billion) and distributed 1.1 billion euros ($1.2 billion), and Rap-Veber says 2023, for which results are forthcoming, "was once again a record-breaking year." Last year, she says, SACEM expanded its blockchain-based Musicstart service, ran a study with Deezer on its pioneering "artist-centric streaming" royalty model and, on the AI front, exercised "the right to opt out of generative AI training databases to ensure fair remuneration for our members" and published a study with GEMA on its impact in music. "I remain convinced that AI needs to be made more virtuous and more transparent," Rap-Veber says. "That's why we [were] in dialogue with policymakers" about the European Union AI Act.

Post Malone, booked by UTA, headlined the inaugural edition of São Paulo's The Town festival.

ROB CARR/GETTY IMAGES

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Methodology

Billboard's International Power Players recognizes executives whose primary responsibilities are outside the United States, solely within the industry sectors shown. Nominations for all of *Billboard*'s industry-sourced executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a submission link is sent by request before the nomination period. (Please email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and for how to obtain an editorial calendar.) Honorees on International Power Players among rights organizations were chosen solely by *Billboard*'s editorial team and not through industry nominations. Honorees were chosen by editors based on factors including their industry impact, as measured by *Billboard* charts; sales and streaming performance; market share; revenue or, where not available, *Billboard* revenue estimates, which may be aided by company guidance; social media impressions; and radio audiences reached, using data available as of April 1. Where required, U.S. record-label market share was consulted using Luminate's current market share for albums, plus track-equivalent and streaming-equivalent album consumption and *Billboard*'s quarterly top 10 publisher rankings. Unless otherwise noted, Billboard Boxscore and Luminate are the sources for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively. Luminate is also the source for radio audience metrics. The source for radio metrics is monitored station airplay from Mediabase provided by Luminate.

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MICHAEL MARCAGI

How "Scared To Start" became a "wild little rocket ship" ride of a hit

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KATE SWEENEY

In late 2023, folk-pop singer-songwriter Michael Marcagi wanted to release a song before the end of the year; his manager, Alex Brahl, was more focused on increasing his artist's TikTok exposure and proposed a regular quota of posts. "Five times a week, that was our ultimate deal," Brahl recalls. Within weeks, both got their wish: Marcagi released his solo debut single, the simmering, acoustic guitar-led "The Other Side," and had developed a following on TikTok. By January, that fandom helped power his breakout hit and next single, the jangly and more uptempo "Scared To Start."

The song became his first Billboard Hot 100 entry in February, since reaching a No. 54 high. It has cracked several rock and alternative charts, including Triple A Airplay — Marcagi's first appearance on the list since 2021 with his former folk-rock band, The Heavy Hours, which split amicably a few years ago. "I knew that I wanted to eventually write music that was narrative-driven and talk about what *I* wanted to sing about," he says.

Growing up in Cincinnati, Marcagi, 32, was drawn to the production of simple folk songs, while his Midwestern upbringing inspired his lyrics — both of which play well into the mainstream resurgence for the genre on the charts. "This style of music is working right now. ["Scared To Start"] has been this wild little rocket ship the past couple months." Brahl can trace the song's takeoff back to one TikTok clip in which Marcagi is playing guitar in a field of dead grass over the lyrics "Let's lay in the dead grass, stare at the stars." After uploading the teaser on Dec. 19, the team went out to lunch — and when it came back, the clip had 10,000 views. "I remember being like, 'What if we wake up tomorrow and it has 50,000?' " Brahl says. "It had 100,000. It was this completely organic thing that just kept going."

In the days before the holiday break, Brahl sent the clip to a few labels, and in the first week of January, Marcagi signed a record deal with Warner. The following week, "Scared To Start" came out as the next single from his *American Romance* EP, which arrived in early February. "We were aggressive in attacking the areas we knew would adopt the song with open arms," says Will Morrow, Warner's vp of viral marketing and digital development. With the hit's success, Warner has another developing star on its roster, joining Teddy Swims and Benson Boone, who have each had top five Hot 100 hits in 2024. "Warner has emerged as a leader in the championing of this new generation of singer-songwriters and the return of guitars in pop music," CEO Aaron Bay-Schuck says.

Recently, Marcagi returned to the same Woodstock, N.Y., studio in which he crafted his biggest hit to date to work on his debut full-length before going on tour. He's now abroad, with dates in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and elsewhere; in May, he'll begin a 23-date U.S. run in Denver. But even on tour, Marcagi's friends send him a photo whenever "Scared To Start" plays on the radio, which he says is surreal. "I remember driving my dad's car and hearing Mumford & Sons and The Lumineers on the radio when I was in high school," he recalls. "It's a weird full-circle moment. It's really wild." b

Marcagi photographed March 29 in Cincinnati.

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